

# Bob's Imagination



***Editor's Note:***

I've never really edited anything before in my life. Never. In fact, the closest I've ever come was a little manuscript I helped throw together that some friends and I like to call Random Sentences. To tell you the truth, I didn't even edit the piece. My friends bestowed the work to one Austin Rich and I decided to help put it together. I typed a bit of it myself and helped print it up for all parties involved. I was proud of myself. But then again, I'm always proud of myself when I finish a piece of writing. You see, I get extreme satisfaction from writing. I'm a writer myself.

Not that that means anything. I've never been published. My fan club includes my girlfriend and a guy named Cerrah, and other than the school newspaper, my writing has never been anywhere where it can be considered useful.

But, I'm not worried. Be it the fact that I know in my heart that my writing will, someday, be useful in some form or another (or the fact that I just sent out about five-hundred copies of my new story to every magazine I can think of), or just some deep-rooted self-confidence, I have found that my writing pleases me, and that's all that I need.

However, it wasn't always like that. I've been writing for quite a while now, and there were several moments at about three in the morning that made me think, "No one's ever going to read this. Why do I even bother?" It was at times like those that I was about to give up. Say, "The Hell with it, I'm just going to take up underwater basket weaving."

Well, obviously I didn't. If I had, well, some other pooper would be writing this and not me.

In short, it took a series of affirmations and other assorted verbal uplifts (and not to mention an actual English teacher who said my work was good) before I woke up and smelled the coffee, so to speak. Writing, then, for me, became not this big goal that I had to reach where I received enormous amounts of gratification instantly, but something a little more personal, and yet still rewarding.

Of course, that gratification stuff does sound nice.

But that's not the point. The point is, I am not, although I once used to think so, alone. There are hundreds of people out there who write, probably more than I do. It may be a journal. It may be love poems to a person you never want anyone to read. It may be a thick and complicated novel that you think no one will want to read. It may be that you are a writer, just like me, but you never thought anyone wanted to read it.

And the point is that some of those people, even though they may already find some personal satisfaction, may need some kind of small gratification along the side.

That's why I decided to edit this magazine as a supplement to the highly-acclaimed Writers' Response Group. Because I want you, and me, and everyone, to receive that small amount of gratification.

So, in other words, I want to read your writing! You've got an entire magazine to fill here so get moving! I'm not the only person who will be reading, there will be millions of people reading it all for their personal satisfaction. (Well, the millions part may not be right, but the rest is.)

SO GIVE ME YOUR WRITING!!!? Anything and everything you've got. I don't care what it's about, I don't care who wrote it, I don't care if you use a pen name that no one on the planet can decipher, I don't care if you don't care about the way I write my editor's notes.

I WANT YOUR FICTION, FANTASY, MYSTERY, ROMANCE, NON-FICTION, POETRY, PLAYS, PROSE, WESTERNS, SCI-FI, HUMOROUS ANECDOTES, SHORT-SHORT STORIES, ESSAYS, EDITORIALS, ANYTHING, ETC. Just give me anything and everything you've got!

Or, how else am I going to get to be known as an editor in this world?

What I'm getting at, in general, is that we have a magazine, we have the time, and we even have a computer that we can mess around on all third period. All we need is your writing. Things would get really boring if I had to fill a magazine with stuff like this, so if you need to find some other reason to send me writing, give it to me so that you can see less and less of this kind of stuff in the future.

Before I sign off, there are a few more things I need to address.

**A Note About Subject Matter & Length:** Some of the first things I hear out of some people are, "Well, they probably don't print the subject matter I write about," and "the stuff I write is too long/short for publication." To those people I have to tell you my one and only rule regarding subject matter & length: there is no rule regarding subject matter and length. As I will point out, stories can be published in parts and be held over for the next issue. As for subject matter, well, I would like to say that there is nothing that I won't accept, but then someone will go and prove me wrong. So, I'll say this: I will print anything and everything that I can, under all the normal rules and regulations of good taste. I will have to censor four letter expletives, but other than that your work can use any other subject or word you like. If you feel, however, that the four letter expletives are necessary, then you can fill them in when you get your own copy.

I do feel that this magazine will need something more than writing, so that is why I am adding a request for art. Mind you, these additions may end up falling through, but if it is humanly possible I would like to carry art.

Any and all submissions can reach me in a number of ways. You can either:

1. Have it sent to Room V-1 where the newspaper staff will get it to me.
2. Have it sent to Mrs. Bridgens, my wonderful advisor in this venture, who will get it to me.
3. Track me down in the hallways and give it to me personally (I'm not that hard to find.)
4. Look for me at the Vintage Inn during the evening (I am often found editing a certain magazine there.)

But however you send it, just send it! Please!

A final word about us: my anonymous cohort and I, as you may have noticed, have some pretty definite opinions on just about everything. That doesn't mean that that is how we run this magazine. Everything in here is yours. The opinions and views expressed here are only those of the person who wrote the piece. It is in no way the opinion of my anonymous cohort or myself, and it will never be unless directly stated. The only reason anything was turned down was because of lack of space. If you have a question or a comment or anything to say about an individual piece of writing, write me a letter in the form of a "letter to the editor". Hopefully, I can replace these with your letters if we get enough.

Until I have another deadline set, this is Austin Rich and I am outta here!

## Bob's Imagination

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I.t.'s. M.o.t. J.u.z.t. A.  
W.o.R.d. A.n.y. M.o.R.e.

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Quentin Hagewood for his great story Fate Into The Unknown

Brandon Burkeen for his wealth of art and writing that will cover the magazine even while he's out of town

Mrs. Bridgens for being my wonderful advisor in this venture

And my cohort and co-editor in this venture, who prefers to remain nameless for some reason.

**untitled**  
by Tim Russell

It started out as a normal day, well, as normal as they get around here. I walked into class and looked around. I saw the normal assortment of suicidal maniacs that one would expect to see around a high school, groups of them huddled together talking and occasionally laughing at something they found amusing, which was usually another person in the room. Toward the back of the room, I saw my bunch, in the same spot they usually were, doing the stuff they were usually doing, sitting and talking.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen, what’s the topic of discussion today?” I asked as I walked up.

“The usual things; death, destruction, world conquest, a way we all can get rich, and of course, what was on Star Trek,” commented Kris.

“Haven’t deviated from our present course have we? Well... can we get rich yet? I need some new speakers.”

No one answered so I took it as a “No”. Just as I was about to ask anyone if they had seen Ron, the five minute bell rang and my voice was drowned out.

“**Has any...**” I yelled just as the bell quit ringing. “Has any one seen Ron?”

“I saw him out in the halls by his locker,” said Jeffrey. “I said ‘hi,’ but he just looked at me strangely. I think something’s wrong.”

“I’ll go sit down. He should come in any time.”

I walked over to my desk and sat down. About 30 seconds after I got situated, Ron came looking very shaken.

“Hey man, your kinda late, aren’t you?”

“I’m okay, it’s just gonna be a bad day... a very bad day.”

“This isn’t like you. You never know. It might be a good day. We might even be able to figure out how to get a million dollars and then I can get some speakers and you can have whatever you want.”

“It won’t matter now, nothing does anymore.”

“Whoa man, what’s the problem? Tell me man.”

“It’s nothing... we’re all gonna die.”

“What? You sound like those preacher guys on tv. Hey, wait... you’ve been watching them again, haven’t you?”

“See, I shouldn’t have told you. It just doesn’t matter anymore.”

Ron picked up his stuff and left the room, but just before he left, he turned around and looked at me. I had never seen him like that. So morbid. Then he left.

The day progressed as normal, but I couldn’t get over the way he looked at me, I never would.

That night I went home and called Ron.

“Hi, Ron. How’s it going?”

“You. Just what I need, another person to call me crazy. Well, I don’t need it.”

“I don’t think you’re crazy. I just want to know what you’re talking about.”

“It doesn’t matter now. I just know we’re all going to die tonight.”

“Okay, Ron. I’ll bet you fifty bucks I’ll be alive in the morning.”

“It doesn’t matter now... I gotta go...”

He had hung up the phone. Just great, a friend of mine snaps because of all the pressure put on teenagers these days. Just great.

I was very tired and felt like going to bed even though it was still very early. My P.E. teacher had me run way too many times around the gym and my legs were killing me. I walked into the kitchen and hung up the phone. I could hear my mom watching the news and reading a Stephen King book at the same time.

“UN forces the Iraqi dictator back out the treaty zone and they have destroyed all of his missiles and warheads.”

“Good. Now maybe we’ve seen the last of him.”

I proceeded to say good night to everyone in the household and then went into my room. I climbed into bed and started to think about what took place today. I sure hope Ron is better by tomorrow. We both have a presentation to give and it will mean the difference between passing and staying in the ninth grade another year.

Just as I started to fall asleep, I heard a loud screeching noise coming from the living room. I got up and

went out to see what it was. My mom had left the TV on. There was a green line on the TV and the letters EBS. I didn't think anything of it and turned it off. From the corner of my eye I saw a light outside. As I turned to look, there was a bright light. I couldn't imagine what it was.

"Is it just me or is it getting warm?" I said aloud

There was another bright flash.

It got hotter.

I turned on the TV.

EMERGENCY BROADCAST SYSTEM.

The phone rang.

"You owe me fifty bucks."

| ----- |

## The Golden Child

by Melissa Cooper

I know a golden child. He is not the usual image of a golden boy. The picture that pops into one's head is probably the big, beautiful, blond football player. A student body officer, prom king type. But no, this is not a true golden boy; he may be any of those things, or someone with those qualities could be golden, but no, that isn't a golden child.

The true golden child is someone who seems to glide through life. They are of exceptional good humor. They seem to radiate a glow of good spirits, of well-being, and of gaiety.

The boy I know is not big, physically, but he is possessed with such a vibrant personality, that he seems larger than life. In the peak of his humorous frenzy, he might seem to pulsate. He becomes a flailing, radiating being; a mass of high-intensity energy.

Anything, and everything is funny to my golden boy. Life is a series of jokes broken by spells of enforced seriousness. Other people can have this attitude, but only a golden child can pull it off. When I tire of people's labored jokes and stories, the golden boy always makes me laugh. No matter how terrible my day has been, the golden boy can make me smile, often in spite of myself.

Quite often, the golden child has a less-than-perfect life. If he had a perfect life, he wouldn't carry it off as well. The gold would go to their head, and there it would tarnish.

I always marvel at my golden boy, and the way he glides through life. He touches so many people. The problem is, people don't see his gold. All they see is his outside. The deceptive, outer coating, that tells a hateful lie about this golden child. All a person has to do, is stop, and be taken in by his glory and his shine. Beneath the ragged surface, lies a true, pure golden child, a boy untouched by society's ills and ignorant of the restrictions put upon him; restrictions made only on a superficial basis.

I know a golden boy. He gives me hope for the future. He gives me a retreat, a peace I could not find in the rest of the world. Everyone needs a golden child. Everyone needs a little gold in their life.

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## Music Reviews

by Rosanne Scott

### Your Arsenal Morrissey

Would you be insulted if someone said to you, "You're the one for me, fatty"? Maybe not if Morrissey was speaking. His new album, Your Arsenal, is the best I've heard from him in a long time. Stephen Patrick Morrissey was crowned the "King of Misery" by the British press and his music was categorized as "doom and gloom". This album features a sound that is newer, fresher, just plain **Harder**. The lyrics are still quintessential Morrissey wit ("you're the one for me, fatty,/ you're the one I really, really love") and with such song titles as "We hate it when our friends become successful," "Glamorous Glue," and "Seasick, Yet still docked," it's the happiest sound I've heard from Morrissey since "Bona Drag".



## Erasure

Vince Clarke and Andy Bell are the front men of Erasure. This band has been putting out records since 1986, starting with The Circus. One of their most popular albums would have to be The Innocents. This excellent record spawned the two singles that you might have heard: “A Little Respect” and “Chains of Love.” Erasure is the ultimate in dance music. Their distinctive sound of synthesizers, heavy bass, and sweet, pure vocals makes for a flamboyant presence all their own. Some of their other albums worth listening to are Wonderland, with the single “Oh L’Amour”, Abba-Esque, featuring “Take a Chance On Me,” and Chorus, with “Love To Hate You.”

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### **Anger and Sadness**

by T.J. Belknap

If somebody cut open my heart right now  
What a surprise they would see  
My anger and madness would all pop out  
And if these feelings were to take shape  
They would be ugly monsters and fire crackers  
There is a river running through  
And it often rains so it over flows  
The monsters would fight and drown in the river  
And all the fire crackers would go off and  
It would look like the 4th of July  
But, then all the monsters would be dead  
And all the fire crackers would be gone  
All that would be left is the river of tears overflowing

### **Candle’s Light**

by T.J. Belknap

A candle stands for many things  
The glowing voice of a fairy as it sings  
A sign of life  
Burning in spite of strife  
The love of a mother for a child  
Fire, tame or wild  
The lack of confidence in children  
Shown by trusting eyes or a pleading grin  
The hope in all our eyes  
Or the feelings of a bird as it first flies  
Remember all the things a candle stands for, and do things right  
Never blow out your candle’s light

## **Tumbling Fall**

by Chris R. DeLay

It grows colder  
Wind shakes leaves out of tired trees  
Rain pitter-pats against the soil  
Earth soaking up her long-lost child

All life on the planet slows, stops  
No longer do the feet of life stomp the ground  
Now is a time for rest  
Quiet

Gone are the vivid colors of growth  
Replaced by the weary tones of leaves tumbling down from their gracious hosts  
And all are covered by a layer of white

## **Winter Storm**

by Josh Minter

Swirling winds of white,  
Blowing in the night,  
Cover the ground with snow,  
The crystals settling into blankets,  
Covering the land,  
Hail falling, like tiny orbs from the sky,  
Pounding down on everything in sight,  
The cold seeping into your very bones.

# The Storm

by Mary E. Landers

When it comes  
It can break the sun.  
And bring the clouds  
Obscure the Warmth.  
Chilling the soul.  
The sky darkens,  
The cold creeps in.  
Sleet falls from the sky,  
Blinding People-  
Fools that they are.  
The water churns,  
The boat tilts  
From side to side  
Making one ill.  
Don't dip your hand!  
NEVER reach out!  
The cold is too deep.  
It will suck you under  
Dragging beneath the waves.  
Stifling your cries of pain  
With their anger  
With their hate.  
No one hearing,  
Through the sounds in the night,  
Your cries of pain  
and cries of fear.  
See the ice  
Floating on the water.  
Hear the wind  
Howling in the night  
Saying words that lash and tear.  
Because someone is different  
The storm has come upon us  
The storm called prejudice.  
A child of color,  
A woman with beautiful eyes,  
A couple that are the same.  
These are the reasons  
The storm has come upon us.  
What is the difference?  
What gives them the right?  
To call the storm  
To fill the night.

## Hold Me

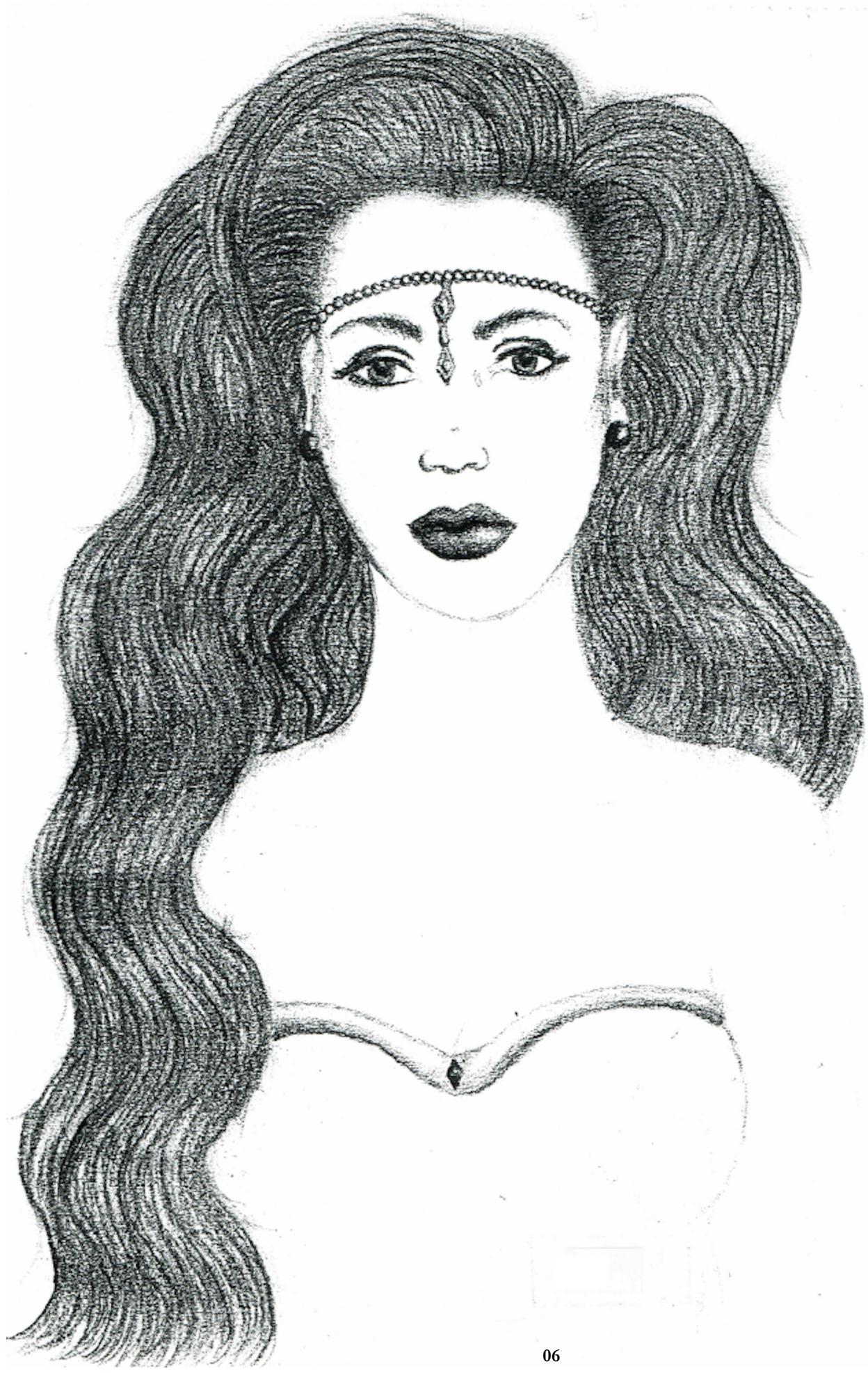
by T.J. Belknap

Dark and damp,  
The night is long.  
Through the trees  
Blows a wind so strong.  
Sounds like  
dying,  
    crying,  
    flying away.

Tease me,  
Please me,  
Let me go

To ride with the wind  
Though the lonely pine trees.  
Like a boat of hope,  
Lost on the seas.  
To be  
    dying,  
    crying,  
    drown

Dry my tears,  
Soothe my fears,  
Hold me from the night.



**Why?**  
By Buck Rich

“Ya fuckin’ fag!”

I don’t know what hurt more, the force of his fist square in my face, or the things that he and everyone else said. Things like “Fag lover,” “Queer,” and other assorted profanities.

This fight obviously wasn’t all too different from others I’d been in. Not many people admired or were friendly to me about my feelings toward a certain subject; the anti-gay rights initiative. I felt gay’s should have equal rights and just about everyone else felt otherwise. It all started when Measure 9 came into Oregon. After that, everything became a blur.

With lots of people disagreeing with me, arguments were a reoccurring thing. All kinds of people came up to me and asked, “How could you feel that way?” I simply told them gays are no different than us, other than the fact that they sleep with someone of the same sex. Sometimes that’s all it took, sometimes.

People can get so angry. They think hurting someone else solves everything. Those guys must have a screw lose. They think their big muscles will solve their problems. Unfortunately, with me, they were right.

“I’m gonna pound you into next week!”

I managed to get an arm up to half way block that punch before it hit my face. The punch caught the edge of my shoulder. Blood was pouring from my nose and I thought I had yet, another fat lip. I could have backed down like all the other times but I kept my fists up, ready to fight, though I never threw a punch.

Billy grabbed me and slammed me into a locker. As a reflex, I tried to kick him. That was a big mistake. I ended up kicking him in the thigh. Now he was really mad.

“I’m gonna rip yer fuckin’ head off and shit down yer neck!” he yelled right in my face. Tiny speckles of spit slapped onto my cheek.

“Why?” I mumbled. I thought it was a stupid thing to say and I prepared myself, half expecting, half waiting for the punch to land somewhere, but it didn’t happen. Everything seemed to stop. I repeated the word with more emphasis.

“Why? Why ya gonna beat me to a pulp? Because of the button on my shirt?” I sounded confident; at least I hoped I did.

Someone from the crowd said “Yeah, why ya doing this Billy?” Others started mumbling the same thing. Some louder than others but a light murmur rang from the crowd.

Billy turned to face the crowd and looked about ready to take them all on and yelled, “Shut up, all a ya. Shut yer fuckin’ mouths!”

Someone in the crowd yelled, “Teacher!” The crowd split up and Billy dropped me but before he left he got right in my face and said, “You’d better watch yer back now ‘cause I’ll be looking for ya and when I find you alone...” he snapped the top off a pencil. Billy turned and walked away laughing. One of his friends followed and bumped into me purposely. “Fag,” he whispered. I’d survived another fight.

I melted into the crowd, avoiding any teachers. I arrived at my locker and James was there. James was my locker partner and close friend. He was about to say hi until he noticed the blood. A long frown spread across his face. He tossed me a rag from inside our locker. I mopped up the blood and straightened up my clothes.

“Why do you let them do that?” James muttered.

“Didn’t have much choice,” I answered.

“Who was it?” James said.

“Billy,” I said, “he just came up and started making remarks. I said kiss off and then he started throwing punches. I guess I kinda deserved it.”

James knew what the remarks were. He knew about my problems, but didn’t want to get too involved. I understood, he could get his face beat in just like me. He was a good friend but I didn’t want him to risk his neck.

James was quiet about Measure 9. He knew how I felt and that it was dangerous to express it openly. For all I knew, he could be No on 9 too but just keep to himself about it. He never said much about it and that was okay by me.

“Maybe you should lose the button,” James said.

“The button stays,” I said. “Don’t you see it James?” I put my hand on my button, “If I give in, then they won. Other people might give in too. If I don’t make my thoughts clear, who will? Who will give people the

choice, the other choice, the other side of the story, not the side that these punks are trying to beat into everyone!” I didn’t realize I was yelling.

“I’m sorry James, I should never have...”

“No, no I’m sorry. I shouldn’t of said anything about the button. It’s just.....”

“It’s just one big stupid problem that seems to never go away.” Neither of us said anymore. The silence was broken by the ringing of the school bell.

“See ya after school,” James said. He was off to class and out of sight. I left shortly after he did.

As if the fights, the arguments and the whispers weren’t enough, the walking through the halls made my whole life hell. People would go out of their way to ram their shoulder into mine. People grabbed my hat and flung it down the hall. My books got knocked out of my hands more times than I could count.

Why? Why do they do these things? Is it worth it? Are the fights, the arguments and the harassment worth expressing the way I feel? Is it worth letting people know that I think gays deserve equal rights? Not special rights, but equal rights. Is it all worth it!!!!!!?

Yes, it is.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Don’t look so down, dude,” it was James’ voice. He must have noticed I had a worried look on my face. I couldn’t help it though. I kept thinking about what Billy had said. I kept seeing the pencil breaking and seeing the eraser end bouncing on the floor and into the wall.

I forced a smile, “I’m not down.” I flipped his hat off. He caught it before it hit the floor. He always did.

I finished putting my books away, turned and gave James a weak smile and sort of rose my hand to say, “See ya”.

“Chill out dude, and don’t take any lip from anyone.” It was James again. He knew I was still worried.

I managed to exit the school without problems from anyone. That was a new experience. My mom wanted me to walk to the store after school to get her a few things. I wanted to get to the store and back home as fast as possible. I always try to avoid any encounter if I can.

I was about half way to the store. I kept to the back streets to avoid being seen. Too many times before people in cars have yelled things, things I didn’t like. I thought I was safe. It wasn’t the first mistake I ever made.

First, it sounded like a plane flying overhead. Then I heard some laughs and yells. Then someone in a car only 150 feet behind me said, “Here I come, ready or not.” It was Billy’s voice.

I always thought I was a fairly good runner, but to outrun a car was totally insane.

I sprinted as fast as I could away from the car. “You’re gonna get it now, boy,” “You’re mine,” and other rude things were shouted at me. They were less than thirty feet behind me when I saw my chance. There, about ten feet ahead of me, to the right side of the road, was a fence.

The fence was about five feet high. I put all my strength into that last ten feet and jumped up, grabbed the top of the fence, and vaulted over.

I was now in a church parking lot. The car screeched to a halt on the opposite side of the fence. Then someone said, “That little shit jumped the fence. Don’t just sit there on your ass, go get him!” It was Billy’s voice.

Two heads appeared over the top of the fence and an instant later two bodies were on my side of the fence. I tried to run, but I soon found out that it’s hard to run when someone has got a hold of you.

Billy appeared an instant later. “Thought you was gonna get away didn’t ya?” A right hook caught my left eye. That punch really hurt. Billy ripped my “Stop the OCA” button off and threw it over the fence. “Why do ya wear that thing anyway?” Billy screamed in my face. “Yeah, why?” asked Ryan. He was the one holding me.

I wanted to cry. There was a sort of churning feeling in my stomach. I thought I was gonna throw up. My eye hurt, my arm hurt where Ryan held it and my feelings were hurt. I was gonna get my face beat in and no one was there to help. I could just let them beat me up and hope to get out alive. No, not this time, I thought. I can’t stand down, someone has got to do it.

“NO!” I said aloud.

“What ya talking about?” said Billy.

by flagon 11 am 98



"No," I said, "Not this time. You can't just go around beating me up. You're wrong. The OCA is wrong. It's gotta stop now. I wear that button not to cause trouble, not to get made fun of, but to let people know that the OCA must be stopped." I've never said so much to someone that was ready to hurt me.

For a moment, and just a moment, I thought I'd gotten through to them. Everything was silent. I thought maybe I was okay. The first clue that I wasn't gonna get away scott free was a fist in the nose. The second clue was a punch to the gut. The punches and laughs kept coming. I thought I was dying. I heard a loud scream. It came from me.

"Shut yer fuckin' mouth. I hate gays. I hate all of them and anyone that would vote with them. I'm gonna do anything and everything to stop them from ruining this world!" Billy shouted right in my face.

"Beat the fuck outta him," "He's a queer," and other laughs and name calling continued from the three guys. My head was throbbing with pain. Everything sort of blurred out of reality.

Why? Why do people do this? Why do people bash someone's head in just because they don't agree with them? I think that's something no one will ever understand.

Suddenly, from the corner of my eye, I saw some flashing lights and heard a man yelling. Billy dropped me and the three of them jumped the fence in a hurry.

It took me a while, but I figured out the flashing lights were coming from a police car and the shouting man was a police officer. He must have heard my screams and came to see what was happening.

Everything was a big blur to me. I couldn't think straight. I felt sore all over and couldn't move at all. It felt like I had a bloody nose, but couldn't even raise my hand to check.

The cop approached me. "Hey man, you look pretty bad." He said, "What did they want with you anyway?" I couldn't answer him. I felt awful. I thought I was going to faint.

"Well, there's no need to worry now. Those punks are gone and won't be bothering you anymore, everything is going to be alright."

Using my last bit of strength, I looked up at the cop and said to him in a very raspy voice, "No... it's not."

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## Natasha

by Rosanne Scott

Natasha was the most beautiful creature Basil had ever seen. Basil was not a passionate man--in fact he was rather colorless in personality--but when it came to Natasha he held back nothing. He pursued her with all the intensity that was lacking in the rest of his life.

He met her when he was only a child, a mere boy of fourteen. She was also fourteen, but she possessed all the beautiful ugliness of a flower about to open. While her face had potential enough, she was not beautiful in the classic sense. What made Basil instinctively gravitate towards her was the conviction that radiated from her thin frame.

You see, Natasha believed that she was gorgeous, and this belief made her so. She had a strong personality and a taste for power. She had no respect for the emotionally weak, the easily dominated or the perpetually smitten. If she sensed a fault in someone, a fault that could be exploited she would exercise her power to the fullest extent.

She was incredibly imposing when she chose to unleash the full aspect of her dominating self. Even though she stood a slight 5'5", her voice cut through the air like knives when she raised it in anger; it commanded and expected to be obeyed.

Basil was a soft, gentle man who hated violence, and what drew him to Natasha like a magnet was the simple fact that she got her way without any fuss. When Basil was with her, he did not have to make choices or decisions or even think; she led him like a dog on a leash. But he loved her: the combination of strong will and beauty was impossible to resist.

Always, Basil felt like Natasha was like the silvery fish he kept. She was elusive; no matter how many nets he cast at her, she managed to slip effortlessly away. She was not like the others; she took no joy in being possessed, no happiness in being someone's girl. Basil longed for her to look at him, for her to say she loved him and to have the meaning touch his eyes. Nothing reached her eyes, no emotion ever washed over them to enrich the cold blue. Basil saw that she was an accomplished actress; she could feign a whole array of feelings.

Sometimes he grew frustrated with her and wished she would make up her mind. Usually these bouts of anger would come late at night, always when he had been drinking. She toyed with him, loving the power, the way he jumped when she spoke. Affection one day, anger the next. Oh! How she tormented him, yet the worst of it was her indifference. He could not fathom how she could treat him so kindly one day, yet drop him the next.

They sat in a small, intimate cafe. Basil was enthralled by the sight of her eyes across the table from him. "Natasha... I think I love you." The words came out in a rush, betraying his nervousness.

She smiled indulgently at him. "Oh Basil, you are such a dear." She drained her coffee cup and set it down with a clack. "Be an angel and get me another espresso, would you?"

Ignoring her request, Basil seized her hand and pleaded, "Oh Natasha! Can't you love me, even a little? I know you have other people in your life, but can't you think of me, sometimes?"

Embarrassment clouded the anger on her face as she snatched her hand away and said, "Shh! Not so loud, you fool! You're making a scene!" Then, realizing she might have just set one of her suitors adrift, she hurried to throw out the life preserver. "I'm sorry, darling. I didn't mean to speak harshly to you, but I despise public confrontations. You of all people should know that by now."

"Natasha! Marry me, say you will. Just do this one thing for me and I will never bother you again." Basil spoke the words almost before he thought them.

Her feathers ruffled, Natasha said, "Oh! I'd better leave, it's late... and... well, I should go. Will you take me home?"

Basil looked at this beautiful phoenix, sensing that he had just made things all the worse for himself. But reason had flown him, nothing mattered now. They walked to Basil's car, Natasha emanating a mixture of upset and embarrassment, not embarrassment for herself, but for Basil. Poor creature! She would never wear her heart on her sleeve and could not respond favorably to that sort of behavior.

Natasha settled into Basil's coupe, praying that he would not continue on his ridiculous display of weakness. For that's what it was, absolute and utter weakness. Basil pushed the starter on the car and they were off.

Occasionally, Basil glanced at her, the expression on his face grimly pleading. As they turned down her street, he decided that he would not tolerate anymore game-playing, that Natasha would indeed be forced to make up her mind this evening.

Pulling up to her house, Basil hopped out of the small car and hastened to open her door for her. "My love, you know I'd do anything for you. May I speak to you, in the garden? Alone?"

Wearily, she sighed, "If you find it necessary." She eyes him languidly, as if he were the least of her worries. Stung, he replied shortly, "I do."

They entered the garden and walked towards the gazebo. Basil noticed the red roses. How beautiful they were! Sharp, glistening thorns, daintily green leaves, exquisite! And the petals--they were a deep, velvety crimson, the edges so red they appeared almost black. Natasha sat on the white bench and folded her hands expectantly. "Yes, my darling? What is it you wanted?" Her manner was that of a court lady, utterly blasé.

He made as if to kneel on the ground before her--his hand shot out and grabbed her wrist. Speaking in a sharp, yet low voice, he hissed at her, "Natasha! I am not to be trifled with. I will not be led like a bull by the nose!"

This surprised her. That dear, sweet, foolish Basil would ever raise her voice to her. Imagine! What folly... Shooting him a look of pure bitterness she opened her mouth to speak.

Before she could utter a sound, he saw his mistake and whispered painfully. "After all this time, don't you love me?"

"Fool!" said Natasha. "Do you possess such feeble eyes that you do not see what is directly before you? To think that I could possibly deign to love you! Do you not see me for what I truly am?" With these words she rose up from the bench and pushed at him with unnatural strength. Basil, being slight anyway, tumbled backwards.

Then a rolling cloud of thick black smoke surrounded Natasha's form and she seemed to shimmer. She appeared almost... demonic to Basil. Then she vanished, leaving only the silver cross she always wore on the ground. Basil simply stared--why hadn't he seen it sooner? The Devil in female form? Impossible! Yet... Natasha... "Ah, Satan." he breathed.

## The Miracle Child

by: Cerrah Seal

Dedicated to Austin Rich in Emordiet

### Part: the first

When I left the party sobriety had gone from me, yet I was still able to conceal that fact and get my car keys from Bill. I was quite good at convincing Bill I was sober even with his keen eye and personal experience.

Bill had killed his younger sister while driving drunk one afternoon. He was sent to pick her up and when he did his wheel pulled her under the car and smashed her skull. He cried for days and lost all will to live. Some say he lost his sanity that day because Bill now lives to go to parties and weld shut a metal container containing the keys of those people enjoying the spirits and spiked punch found at parties.

All that I had to do was clear up my eyes, dry my tears and concentrate on portraying sobriety, and Bill was convinced right up until I backed into Jerry's car.

I got out of my car and slammed the door. Bill came out of the house without my knowledge and he was the first to see any of my gift. He watched me heal Jerry's car by pulling the crushed metal into perfect condition, without touching it, and then mentally repainting the surface of the metal that was barren of paint because of the creases now gone.

When the rear fender was fixed I drove off and Bill sat in awe and at that point decided not to speak of the odd incident for fear of being accused of sneaking in a few drinks in spite of his detest.

I was not feeling well. My parents were being particularly cruel to me and in spite of my mental coercion did not want to allow me to party on this night. Little did they know that until this night my "Parties" had been lone trips to the cafe on the corner of Oak and Landing to enjoy creamless coffee. This was the first night I had actually accepted one of the constant invitations given to me by people who thought that I was the coolest individual in school. Little did they know that their opinion of me was just a thought put in their head by me and that they truly knew nothing about me.

I did that these days because anymore I felt the constant need for affection, and the one thing that I needed most was still lacking and would be until it came by natural ways--Love.

I was thinking of my need for love when at last I let go of the steering wheel. I feel that I could have made myself sober but the comfortable numbness gave me a different sense of power than I had ever had, and I liked that. I was thinking that my parents were not necessarily angry enough, and I knew that their anger was what this beast inside of me fed on. The one thing that allowed me to thrive as the mystic child that I was was simple unadulterated anger, and my lust for that grew into a hate for my parent-figures that made me want to leave home and become President of the entire Nation, or something.

When I let go of the steering wheel I was able to watch, as if in slow motion, every instant that I could have avoided the accident about to happen.

To this day I mourn for the Karman Ghia that I could have healed had my lust for attention and my parents' anger not willed the police to come. The officer's first reaction was correct; I was indeed intoxicated however my immediate reaction was to 'suggest' to the officer that I was sober.

His sobriety tests were unseen by his eyes because his mind saw only what he wished to see and I told him to see.

He released me after a medical examination and told me to go home with my now understanding parents. I yelled, "No!!" and became upset at the officer for releasing me and assuming that the accident was indeed an accident instead of reckless driving.

I said, "Officer I am drunk--arrest me," with an ambiance of silliness that I was certain would convince the officer of my intoxication, and he replied, "Son, I have checked your blood and you are certainly not drunk. What you are is shaken and you probably are looking for an excuse for your error in driving."

"But sir, you don't understand. I am a Miracle Child."

### Part: the second

“Cody, you really must be more happy. Everybody knows that deep inside you are not incompetent. All of your life you have wanted to be a writer and now when someone comes along who you think is better than you you’re ready to quit? Bad move. That’s stupid. You should be working on bringing out what we all know is there instead of suppressing it by feeling incompetent. I used to feel that you were superior to me but now I just realize that we are different. I shan’t try to compare myself to you because we are all different. And neither should you.

“Why do I feel like I am the only one talking? Is it because I am?

“Say something, dammit.”

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe we are different, but you are still better because you are unsuppressed.”

“You will never feel better about yourself if you think like that. Think in your potential and not in your current ability. I know that sounds like bunk but try it. You will get better. I know it and so do you.”

“What will become of these bitter sounding words? Will they become a book to me, or will they simply be? A tome yet never written? A manuscript left in the escaping corners of my imagination?”

“See, you’re getting better already. Just write it down and the least you will have is a collection you could call Deep Thoughts by Cody Poore. A sure thing for the publishers.”

### Part: the third

“I don’t know why you insisted that you were drunk. You know that we would have been angry at you, and disappointed in you. Besides, it was a little more than obvious that you were sober.”

I hated them thinking they were always the correct party in our conversations. I hated the term ‘disappointed in you.’ And worst of all I hated the fact that when anger struck me my will was no longer mine but was respondent to my beast and I could not help but to be sober.

Nothing really happened that night. I was taken home by my parents and after my father’s little conversation to me about lying to him and Mum he promised to buy me another car that was identical to the one I totaled on the tree. I stormed out of the room that night in a pretend fit of rage and was worried not about the new car but about the higher insurance I had taken to paying on my own because I was trying to work myself out from beneath my father’s support and protection.

The following morning I told my father I would prefer a white car as opposed to my previous preference to subtle yellow. I then went to school and walked through the halls I began to hate being in.

I hated the halls because of the tremendous difficulty I had reaching everybody that saw me and changing their impressions to positive ones. I felt that in a few more years of practice in these halls I could go anywhere virtually naked and not have a single person notice. I could even convince them all that I was strolling the streets naked in the dead of winter while fully clad in the customary apparel.

After school I visited the church I had grown accustomed to visiting at this time and I lit a candle in the hopes that God would grant me understanding.

After that I walked outside and I began to wonder why I was really the way I was. As far as I knew all of this happened suddenly in chemistry last year but that incident with the frog was most likely not my first experience. It was just the first that I remember.

### Part: the fourth

“Oh what a beautiful baby!”

“I would stay away from that evil child, cousin Betty. He peed on me.”

“He did not, and you know it. When you came screaming in the kitchen and you said that to me, I was the first to see that your face was as dry as a bone. Sometimes I wonder about you, Marti, you do seem to have quite an imagination that likes making people angry.”

“The little twerp had a smile on his face when he did it too, almost like he enjoyed seeing me angry!”



Joan Ross & Brandon Burkes

### Part: the fifth

I walked to the Azul cafe where I selected my usual table and had coffee brought to me by the same waitress who had been bringing it for a year now. I sipped slowly one cup and when I had finished it the waitress brought me another and sat down across from me. This she had never done before and wild thoughts began running through my head like, "Does she like me?" or, "Is she making the first move?"

"Why don't you ever talk... to me? You sit in here nearly every night and yet you say nothing to me. Why is that?"

"I don't know. It just didn't seem to be the thing to do."

"I missed you last night. I heard that you totaled your car. What happened?"

"Fuck you!" I shouted as I stormed out of the cafe. This had really gotten to be too much for me to take. What was going on? I hadn't put anything into her head and yet she seemed to be doing exactly what I had desired. I didn't understand.

Before I rounded the corner I turned around and started back toward the cafe. When I opened the door I saw that 'she' was still sitting at the table and instead of waiting for them to seat me I simply walked directly to it. I sat and stared into 'her' eyes.

"Well?" she said. "Nevermind, you don't have to tell me."

"I let go of the steering wheel and watched myself wreck. Okay?"

"It's fine. I am sorry I asked."

We sat for a long fifteen minutes staring into each other's eyes, and when she started to get up at the end of her break I put my hand on her knee and said, "Wait! Can you come back?"

She nodded and I watched her walk away. I sat puzzling what had happened and thinking of her face. I knew nothing of the reasons for what I did in the cafe.

For the four hours I sat in that cafe thinking after she left all I could think of was the indefinite details of her face and the ever-so-soft lines in her soft complexion. I could see the cover up beginning to peel away in the heat of early summer and the soft beads of sweat that were noticeable only if you were looking. I never once saw a detail I disliked.

As the four hours grew nearly up she periodically glanced toward my table to assure herself that I was still waiting, and when the clock read ten o'clock I waited at my table patiently for her to reemerge from the steam of the kitchen area.

When she did she had removed her apron and I could see clearly what a beautiful person she was. I stood and walked over to the cashier where she was standing, paid for my coffee, and as we left the cafe she said, "My name is Bobbi. What's yours?"

I did not answer her until we arrived at my father's car and then I replied, "Theodore Andrew, call me Theo."

I asked her if I was giving her a ride home and she never did reply. She got into my father's car and I drove to the golf course. I knew that we could walk to anywhere in town from the golf course. She knew as well and got out.

She said, "You didn't have to do this."

Before I could say that I wanted to, she handed me a piece of paper with her phone number on it and ran along the pedestrian path until she was out of sight.

I got back into the car and drove home.

### Part: the sixth

Several days passed in which I choose not to go to the cafe. I did not want to face Bobbi and it was the fear of her true feelings that caused me to worry.

I reached the end of my rope and was ready for complete rejection or an end to the suffering caused by simply not knowing what to do. I called her late one Thursday night at around 9:30.

She wasn't home. As all of my built up adrenaline eased away and my muscles began to relax, then immediately tightened again when I realized that even though she wasn't home and I couldn't talk to her now I would have to go and see her at work if I was going to get anywhere

### Part: the seventh

I walked into the cafe and was directed to my customary spot in the corner. Bobbi walked out of the kitchen area and the look on her face suggested that she knew I was coming. She smiled and without even asking brought me a cup of coffee.

She sat across from me and stared into my eyes until at last she shot up from her chair at the bellow of her boss. In anger I asked her to sit down, and her boss strangely did the same. I changed her boss's mind.

I asked her to join me in the park and she said that she would but her boss might be a problem.

After a short discussion with him he saw us out the door and was looking quite confused as to why he just said goodbye to one of only two waitresses.

We got into my father's car and I drove to the golf course. We got out and walked to the unusually quiet gazebo in the center of the city. We sat and swung in the swinging settee for a long time before she finally spoke to me in a quiet voice and told me her story.

### Part: the eighth

"I was kicked out of my house last year, Theo. I have been working at the cafe since well before then and I sleep at the house of an old lady I once cooked for. She has long since forgotten who I am yet still welcomes me to sleep in her spare room, every night.

"My mother, at the time she kicked me out, was afraid I would end up like my younger brother. She kicked me out and though I am sure she would accept me I am never going back there.

"I live happily with an old lady who doesn't remember who I am from day to day, I eat only what I can find extra at the cafe, and school meals, and I constantly fight the feelings that I too want to forget who I am.

"I hate who I am, Theo, and the only one who seems to care is you.

"And even you I sometimes do not see for days. I get sick during those times. I get so sick that I wish I could die all the more. You... you don't even know me and here I am pouring my heart out to you.

"Do you see these tears? Do you see them! They are the love I don't have."

"I do care for you, Bobbi. And I want you to know that all I have been able to think of for a long time is finding love. And finally you seem to be the one I'm supposed to find."

"Hold me," Bobbi said as she wiped her tears on my shirt.

I held her long into the night, just sitting there. I didn't need to say anything. And when the city lights all seemed to dim I walked her home and then found my way to my own bed.

*To Be Continued...*

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### **Déjà Vu** by Austin Rich

Jerry Fields was awoken by a sound outside his window. Not that the sound was all that loud, or identifiable, but it woke him nonetheless. Jerry could barely sleep anyway, and was waiting. Jerry went to the window and peered through the moonlight and saw a man at the corner, walking. The man was shrouded in shadows and could not be seen well. Jerry turned and for some reason, when he looked back, the man was back at the corner again. Jerry was quite startled, and went back to bed. But no sleep was in his future, at least not tonight.

Jerry looked at the doorway of his room before turning off the light. He saw nothing but shadows and pools of darkness. Jerry peered into the night and for some reason, and shadow moved. Jerry checked this out, and to his knowledge shadows didn't move unless the object casting the shadow moved. Since he could not determine what the object was causing the shadow, he thought maybe he was just jumpy. He looked back, and there, hovering

STRUGGLE WILL DO YOU  
NO GOOD, TERROR, FOR  
YOU ARE A PRISONER OF  
CHAOS INC. AND MYSELF...

THE  
VAMPIRE!!

TERRIFIC.

in mid-air, was a reflection of moonlight. It appeared to be swaying back and forth, as if a person was standing not completely still, but silent. Jerry decided that *he* was finally here.

Jerry turned on the light and *he* was standing there, illuminated by the light like a legend. His face was mostly normal, light stubble here and there, and a normal nose, with a normal pair of ears the fell off to the side. His hair was quite bulky, and it stuck out in nearly all directions almost to the point of being unkempt. But there was a hint of some kind of order to how it was combed.

One overpowering aspect of *him* was his eyes, or lack thereof. He was wearing sunglasses, jet black that almost reflected no light. Even though Jerry had never seen *him* before, Jerry felt that he knew this person, and that the sunglasses just... belonged. He was wearing a black jacket and black gloves, and the end of a staff was sticking out from behind his back as his right hand slipped into the respective pants pocket. Jerry realized the reflection he had seen in the dark was that of the buttons on his jacket. Though Jerry did not look anywhere other than directly at this face, Jerry could know he was wearing boots, like he knew the guy or something.

The man said, in a calm and deep voice, "My name is Déjà Vu." As he said that, the word 'Vu' stuck out in his mind and reverberated, not vocally but mentally. This put a confused look on Jerry's face, as he mulled over what he had just experienced, something unlike, and yet familiar to, anything he had ever experienced before.

Jerry said, "Uh... Hi. I'm Jerry Fields." Déjà Vu stood there for a second, unchanging. Then he said in a calm and deep voice, "My name is Déjà Vu." As he said that, the word 'Vu' stuck out in his mind and reverberated, not vocally but mentally. This put a confused look on Jerry's face, as he mulled over what he had just experienced, something unlike, and yet familiar to, anything he has ever experienced before.

Jerry opened his mouth, and was about to say the words, "Uh... Hi. I'm Jerry Fields," but then he realized what Déjà Vu had just done.

"Now cut that out!" snapped Jerry. Déjà then slid into a less formal standing position as he shifted his weight to his right foot, and spoke the words, "I got a reputation, ya know? So what do ya want?"

Jerry still looked at him in minor confusion.

"What's wrong, Fields?" inquired Vu.

"Well... it's nothing, nevermind. Déjà Vu, I need you to do a... uhm, job for me."

"What kind of... uhm, job are we talkin' about?"

"I need, a..." Jerry thought about it for a second, and in a low whisper said, "I want you to perform a government coup."

"What did you say?" asked Déjà.

"I want you to perform a government coup, okay?" said in that, "Will you stop bugging me?" tone of voice.

"A government coup?"

Still in a huff, and heading toward his desk he voiced, "What, is there an echo in here?" Jerry soon regretted saying that, because just then Déjà said, "A government coup?" and Jerry, now back where he started and heading toward his desk again said, for some reason, "What, is there an echo in here?"

"I really wish you wouldn't do that," even though he understood full well that Déjà would listen to him about as much as we would listen to a new politician saying, "I am not a crook."

"So, is that all I get to know, or do I overthrow all the countries in the world 'til I get the right one?"

"No... well... yes... but... I don't know!"

"Well, a government coup is a little difficult to do when the person who wants you to do it doesn't even know what country to coup."

Again, in a low whisper, Jerry said, "It's the United States."

"What did you say?"

"The United States, okay? Jesus Christ!"

"Really?" said Vu, in a voice different than before, mainly because of the shock.

"Really," whispered Jerry.

"Hey, that's my line you stole there, Jer."

Jerry failed to see any humor in that statement.

"Well now, a government coup, here in the United States, performed by yours truly. That's pretty nifty. And spendy. My price for you is \$200,000,000." Déjà Vu then turned, and started to leave.

"....." was all Jerry could get out, and finally he blurted, "\$200,000,000?"

Déjà turned his head and asked, "Is that a problem?"

"Well, you could say that. It's just that... that is just a tab bit out of my price range."

"Gee, I wonder why? You tell me you want a U.S. government coup, no reason or rhyme, or what to do after the job is done, and still want a reasonable price?"

"Okay, fine. What do you want to know?"

Sitting down, making sure that he was going to be comfortable for one hell of a story, he said, "Well, let's start with Why?"

"The truth?"

"Preferably."

Jerry sat down. He mulled over what he was going to say. He would have to pick his words very... carefully. He cursed his brother, who seemed to have been the one in his family who was a master at verbal interplay.

"I want my job back," he finally managed.

"Job?"

"Yes, my **job**. The one that I was **fired** from."

"And," said in that voice that tries to hide confusion, "what might that job be?"

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Well you should be."

"I might as well give you the full story. I used to work for the U.S. government. My position was under the C.I.A. as a search scientist. I started a totally unique project, chimpanzee evolution. I wanted to accelerate the mental processes of chimp and other monkey-family animals so they can be trained like humans. That way in war times, the draft would become...."

"Obsolete?"

"Well, yes. But I ran into some... problems. Chimps began to go crazy. Lab workers got killed by psycho monkeys, and more than the projected number of chimps died before success. And we still weren't even close to completion. And that just isn't done, not in the government. My project was shut down. And when I protested, I was fired."

"So... you want me to get into control of the U.S. government just to rehire you? Then what?"

"I don't care. Pass a bill saying they can't fire anybody named Jerry Fields, you can put Quayle in the presidency for all I care. All I want is my job, or one just like it, back. Afterward, do whatever you want." Then, under his breath he muttered, "So damn close."

"If it's that important, there are other research centers that you..."

"No!" Jerry snapped. "I've been blacklisted, so to speak. I have to do it this way, I have to have that job back. No alternatives."

"Okay. I go in, take over the U.S. government, rehire you, then let them go about their business as if nothing had happened?"

"That, basically, is it."

"Okay, \$200,000,000."

"....." but it was too late, this time Déjà Vu was gone. When he went back to the window, Jerry saw a man back at the corner, shrouded in shadows, walking...

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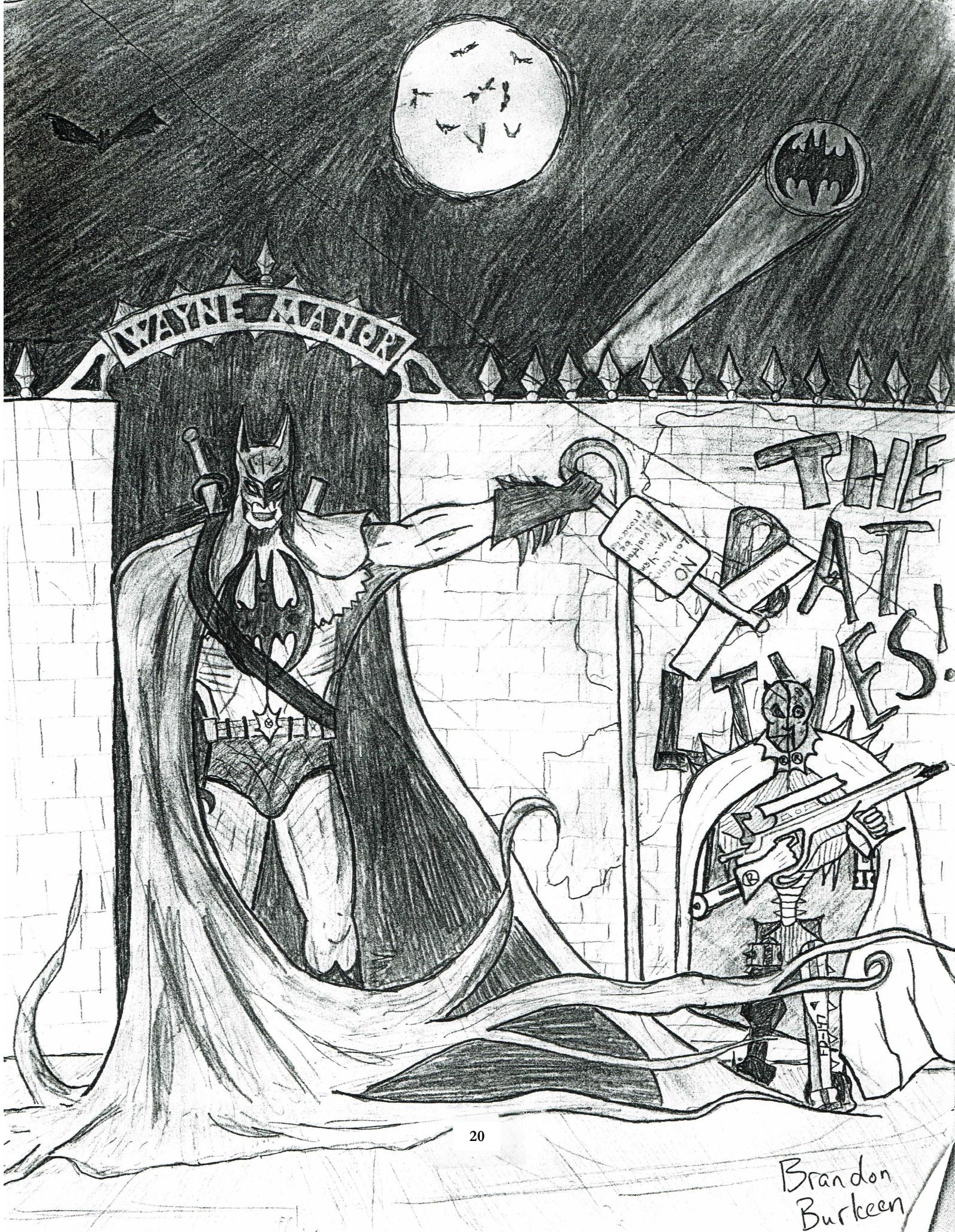
## Shadows

by Damon Brice

The huddled figure darted down a dark alleyway, behind a garbage can, and through a broken window. Close behind it could be heard the ever-closing footsteps of someone twice its size. It raced up the stairs of a condemned building, tripping itself in its haste. The figure following him closed in with every step.

The figure reached the top of the first flight of stairs and paused for breath. Maybe I've finally lost him, it thought. The sound of heavy breathing and swift, heavy footsteps on the stairs below soon banished this vain hope.

Panicking, the smaller figure looked to its left and saw an ancient elevator shaft, its rusty cables hanging perfectly motionless in the near-total darkness. Seeing a way out, however slim, the figure lunged for the cables. It caught hold of the nearest one and began to climb frantically.



A rat scurried along the wall to its home, a hole in the crumbling mortar of the decrepit structure it inhabited. The figure noticed it out of the corner of its eye as it scrambled up the creaking cable.

Funny, it thought. There's not supposed to be rats in the crystal palace. I'll have to talk to the caretaker.

The large figure shouted gibberish in a deep masculine voice. He tried to talk to the smaller figure into coming back, but it didn't want to be put in the dungeons anymore.

"I must get away," the figure gasped as it pulled itself up the passage.

A moonbeam reflected from a broken mirror fell on the figure's body, revealing the well-muscled form of a man in his mid-thirties. His complexion was pale, and his hair was a dingy yellow. It fell about his shoulders in stringy matted curls. His clothes hung on him in tatters, and he wore no shoes.

Had anyone been there to witness the event, they would have said that what captured the attention were the eyes. Their pale blue color accented the frenzy reflected in them, denouncing any claim the man had once had to sanity. They darted around frantically, always focusing slightly behind whatever he was looking at.

At the moment they were focusing on the wall behind the place where the rat had been. He vaulted from the cable into the corridor. He felt the deep plush carpet of the palace push up between his toes as the soles of his feet were cut to ribbons by the shards of broken glass lying on the tile floor. He sprinted down the hallway and up the majestic spiral staircase to a large door.

The door was rusted, and the paint flaked off of it in large pieces. The faded words "Emergency Exit Only" were faintly visible in good light, but in the near-darkness of the stairway they were inscrutable.

The man pushed against the door in the flickering light of a tall candelabra mounted on the wall beside the door. Farther down the stairs he heard the warped echoes caused by the calls of his pursuer.

The door swung open onto the roof of the building, perhaps eight stories high. The man looked around the flagstone balcony and moved toward the battlements, gazing around him at the gleaming turrets and minarets rising majestically toward the sky.

Below him, his antagonist followed the trail of blood up the steps past a broken light fixture and out a fire escape onto the roof. He called once again to the man, trying to keep his voice calm. There was a sense of urgency to it-he feared the other was in serious danger.

The man's eyes, eyes too blue to be quite human, turned to gaze on the larger figure. They then turned to look over the edge of the castle walls at the attacking force below. There was a large amount of siege equipment, and he knew that even the impregnable walls of the crystal palace must ultimately fall to their strength. He knew that he must go for help, and he didn't have time to deal with his "follower".

He stepped up on the battlement and pronounced archaic words of powerful magic, transforming himself into a red-tailed hawk. He turned from the battlements to see the human running toward him madly. He looked at the mortal deprecatingly, then turned to launch from the battlement.

The larger man lunged, just a little too late to stop the suicidal leap of the other. The man leaped clear of the rooftop and plunged headfirst into the hood of a police car.

He knew that something had gone wrong with the spell as soon as he was clear of the castle walls. He gyrated wildly as the catapult below him loomed closer. His last sights were of green rolling hills and men in gleaming armor. The perfect blue dome of the sky stretched above him to infinity.

\*\*\*

Ned Wilson was lying in bed, unable to sleep. His friends told him there was nothing more he could have done, but he couldn't help wondering. He stared out his window at the neon sign across the street. It illuminated the blanket of smog above the city--the blanket which hid mankind from the heavens. He glanced down at the group of punks on the corner, and reached out to close his curtains. He took a deep breath, choked on the air thick with a hundred different carcinogens, and turned his gaze to the framed certificate on the wall which identified him as a registered nurse.

Nuts. The guy had been completely bananas--or so it was comfortable to think. Ned sat up and lit a cigarette. He thought for a moment about the world as it was, and wondered silently to himself about who really needed to question their sanity.

## Chapter 1: Simple

by Teresa Vessels

Simple. There is nothing complex about it. Life in this village is so completely predictable that there is no point in planning anything. Poppa harvests the wheat and corn in the summer, clears the fields in the fall, he chops wood in the winter, and replants in the spring. Nothing changes. Momma cooks, mends things, and spins when she's not doing some other chore. Beau has a herd of sheep he tends to. High ground in the summer, low ground in the winter. Sheer them in the spring.

The other families in the village have different, yet unchanging, lives. I want to have adventure. To visit magical places, go to the King's Palace. I want to see and do everything! I am only a girl, barely seventeen years old. How could I convince Momma, or for that matter Poppa, to let me leave this dreary place?

Ella is going to be here soon. Off to the market as usual.

"Corali! Hurry, the market opens in an hour!" Ella cried from the road.

"I'm coming! We'll be there in plenty of time, don't worry."

There she was, Ella, the potter's daughter. Her long blonde braid, pale skin, pale eyes, her bland dress, the same as it ever was. Nothing like me. We are perfect opposites. My dark, wavy hair, black eyes, tanned skin, and desire for adventure only makes her lack of spirit all the more pronounced. She'd be happy to stay here in Bend's Crossing, marry, and have children.

"Corali! You've made us late again! The market is already open," Ella whined.

"Ella, we come here everyday. The other merchants always save us a spot. You worry too much!"

\* \* \*

"There have been quite a few new travelers here. The inn must be overflowing with guests. Did you notice their clothes. They look rich. Maybe they're royalty?" Ella whispered.

"Ella, why would royalty come to Bend's Crossing? I can understand if they were rich land holders traveling to a city and stopping here for the night, but not royalty."

If only they were royalty. Maybe one of them would take me away as a maid or something. It's too good to be true.

"Good day, m'lady."

"Good day, m'lord."

"What is it that you are selling on this fine day?"

"Cloth, yarn, and unspun wool made by my mother from the wool of my brothers sheep. Over here I have wheat, flour, corn, and meal made in my fathers mill. Is there something here that interests you?"

"There is a bolt of fabric in my sister's favorite color that I would like to buy her as a gift. How much are you asking for the entire bolt?"

"By the yard, two silver pieces. There are twenty-five yards to that bolt. Fifty silver or two gold pieces."

"I did not bring that much with me to the market. I have enough at the inn where I am staying. If you would care to bring me the bolt this evening and dine with me as well, I would be pleased."

"I would be happy to join you for dinner and I will bring with me the bolt. May I ask your name, m'lord?"

"Aaron. Aaron Lasting. The innkeeper will know me and send you to my room. And you are?"

"Corali Sorrows. I will arrive at the inn a half a candlemark before the inn serves supper if it would please you?"

"It would."

Today has definitely been different

\* \* \*

I know! I'll tell Poppa that a rich man bought an entire bolt of fabric and asked me to deliver it to the inn and he would buy me dinner in thanks for the delivery.

\* \* \*

Aaron is very handsome. Ella said that by the way he looked at me, she knew he liked me. If only I were so lucky. I could leave this place.

Why did I leave home so early? I have at least a quarter of a candlemark until I see him and I'm almost there. Maybe if I walk slower I can get there on time.

I'm still a little early, oh well.

"Good evening, innkeeper!"

"Good evening, Corali. How's your ma and pa? Your brother's flock doing alright? What can I do for you?" The round bellied clerk led the way inside as a stableboy came to take Corali's horse into the stable, but not before she had retrieved the bolt of fabric from her pack.

"I am here to deliver this bolt of fabric to Aaron Lasting. He said to meet him in his room."

"He's upstairs. Third door on the right. He asked for a window overlooking the stable. Quiet fellow, been here a few days and this is the first time he's left his room."

"Thank you sir!" Upstairs. Third door on the right. Should I knock or just call? I think I'll knock.

"Come."

"Aaron? I brought your fabric. Where should I put it?" She searched the room and couldn't identify where his voice was coming from.

"Next to my saddlebag. I have something important to tell you. Would you like to eat first or should I speak?" he asked as he stepped from behind the wardrobe.

"Talk. I'm not quite hungry yet. What's so important that it should concern the likes of me?" she replied hesitantly.

"There is an army of Kintec Warriors marching toward the capitol. They need supplies. An unguarded village ripe for the pickings is an easy target. When I saw you at the market I knew you wanted to leave this place. This is your opportunity to leave and not get yourself killed in the attack. I have planned to leave after dinner. Will you come with me?" All of this was said in a tone so serious it was deadly.

"Why me?" An attack. Kintecs. Heavens, this in my chance and no one will miss me. They'll figure I was killed or taken captive.

"You have no true blood ties here. That much is obvious, and it is all the more unlikely that you would run around screaming out a warning. I also have reason to believe I'll need you."

"You're right. I have no family here, I was adopted by a family here when I was three. My parents were northern wanderers. I'll go with you when you leave."

Aaron was an imposing man in his blue-black close fitting outfit. His skin was tanned to the color of a copper coin, obviously from long hours of working in the sun. His short black hair and blue eyes gave him a deeply poetic look and his smile could melt steel. On the whole, Corali found him to be the most attractive than she had ever seen. His well muscled torso only added to his almost tangible grace and poise.

"I saw that you had a horse when you rode in, but he's not in good enough shape to make the trip. It's just pure luck that I managed to bring with me two saddle horses. With the little amount we are going to be carrying we don't need a pack horse. Can you ride well enough to keep up a forced pace?"

"I can ride well enough not to fall off, if that's what you're asking!"

"Good. Then change into these." He handed her a dark blue, almost purple, suit of clothes perfect for riding. "They should fit you well. You're about the same size as my sister."

Corali changed into the unfamiliar clothing while Aaron patiently turned his back until she put her hand on his arm, signalling him that she was done.

\* \* \*

Dinner was quiet, but tensed.

I can't believe I'm actually leaving this horrid place. But how is it that Aaron knew we are to be attacked or that I wanted to leave? He could be a spy. No, that's too far fetched. I'd best wait to think on this until I'm a little more level headed and can ask him some questions. He seems so honest that I'm sure he'll explain everything.

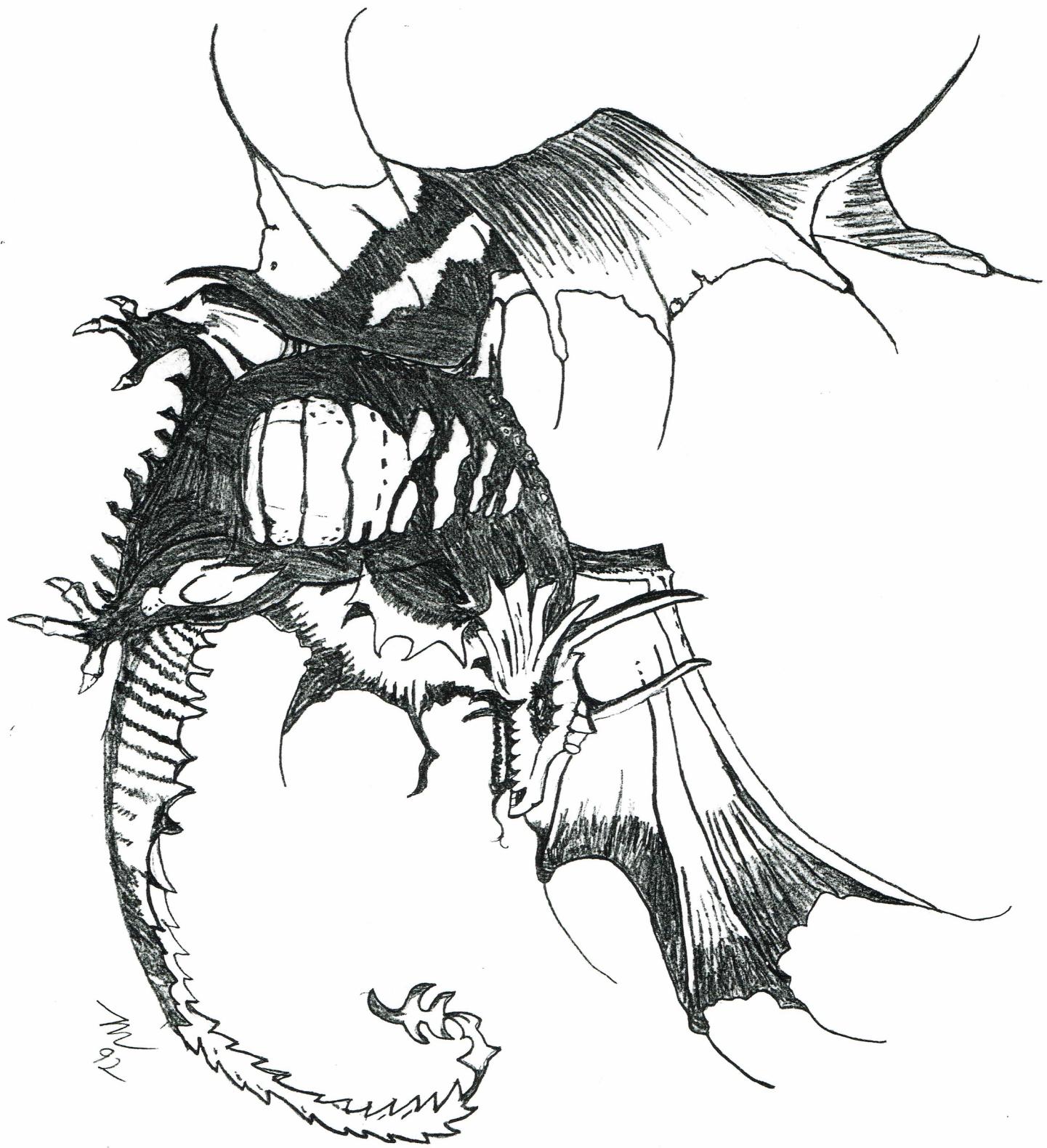
As darkness fell, Aaron and Corali crept out the window of his room onto the roof of the stable. Aaron climbed down through the thatch of the stable roof into the stall of his horse. He helped Corali down and pushed her in the direction of the other horse, a tall, lean, dappled gelding. She saddled him as best she knew how, but had to have Aaron fasten the intricate snaps of the harness. They were silent as they passed a sleeping stable hand. They steered themselves through the town and mounted only when Aaron felt sure they were out of earshot. No sooner had they left the town boundaries when the town began to go up in flames. Corali could hear the screams of the victims and the solemn, bloodthirsty battle cries. Those cries haunted her until she could no longer control the hysterical tears that ran down her cheeks. Aaron did not notice or ignored her tear stained checks when she asked him where they were going.

"We are going to the Great City, to the King's Palace. I am a servant

there and am returning with a message."

And he said nothing more to her as the road through the darkness turned into the dawn.

*To Be Continued...*



## Durghar

by Josh Minter

### Chapter 1

Durghar climbed through the open window, being careful not to make a sound. The only light was from the two moons in the night sky. He looked around the room. There were boxes piled here and there. It was a storeroom he had entered. There was a door to his right and a stairway to his left. At the top of the stairs, he found a door. He tried to turn the knob, but it was locked. He reached down to his boot and removed some carefully hidden lockpicks. He selected one and inserted it into the lock. He then probed around until he found the first tumbler. Then he inserted another lockpick and twenty seconds later a sharp click told him the door was unlocked. He opened the door slowly so it wouldn't creak. It took him eight minutes to open the door far enough for him to slip through. He stepped into the room which was dimly lit with moonlight from a window to his left. Light shined directly on the bed, illuminating the form of a sleeping man. He slowly and cautiously searched the room. After about ten minutes he found a hidden panel. He removed the panel to reveal a pouch of gold, some jeweled rings, and a large diamond. He scooped up the goods into a bag and silently left the way he had come. After he had made sure no one had seen him leave, he quickly disappeared into the night.

### Chapter 2

“I’ll give you fifty gold pieces for it.”

“It’s worth seventy-five, you money-loving wench.”

“Take it or leave it, Durghar.”

“You’re more of a thief than I am, Leila,” Durghar said, as he took the fifty gold pieces from her hand.

“Of course I am. How do you think I stay in business?” replied Leila.

“Alright, scamp, what will you give me for these rings?” he asked.

“Sixty for the lot of them,” Leila said.

“These are worth 150, Leila, I want 110,” said Durghar rather seriously.

“How about eighty, Durghar?” replied Leila.

“One hundred,” said Durghar.

“Ninety, that’s my final offer, Durghar,” said Leila rather impishly.

“The thieves guild is going to catch you Durghar. They’ll kill you to keep you out of their territory,” said Leila.

“Not if they can’t catch me,” he replied as he left the building. He traveled down the street a short way before entering a bar called the “Crossed Sword.” He proceeded to take a seat in the corner. About fifteen minutes later he was joined by a weasel-faced man.

The man was dressed in a dark green tunic and black breeches. The man set a small crossbow on the table along with two grappling arrows, one of them being slightly smaller than the other.

A barmaid appeared with two cups and a brown bottle. The strange man tossed a gold coin on the table and started to pour. The barmaid quickly snatched up the coin and disappeared.

The two men sat there drinking for a long time before either of them spoke. The silence between them was broken only by the sound of Durghar setting down his cup.

“Have you decided to accept my offer?” Durghar said.

“Yes, I believe I have. I’ll do it.”

### Chapter 3

The night was dark, neither moon was in the sky. The night’s silence was disturbed only by barking and the high-pitched whistle of an arrow cutting through the air. It sailed over a wall and landed with a light splash. The cord attached to the arrow was slowly pulled back. As the arrow slid back towards the wall, it opened like a blossoming flower to reveal three strong iron hooks. The arrow continued on its slow journey until it hooked on a courtyard statue. The cord was then pulled taught. Then the man who had fired the arrow, pulled himself up to make sure it would hold his weight, when he was sure he began to climb. When he reached the top of the wall, he peered over to make sure no one was there. He saw nothing, and quietly slipped over the wall. He landed silently on the ground. He then retrieved his arrow and stashed it and the cord in the folds of his cloak. He crept silently through the shadows, making sure not to set off any traps that might be there to stop such intruders. He passed a

small, locked building with hardly a glance at it. When he reached the main building, he looked for the balcony he was supposed to enter by. He saw it about a hundred feet away. He quickly glided along the wall until he was below the balcony. Seconds later he was in a tree that climbed up only a few feet away from the balcony. He sat there for several minutes, waiting. When he was ready, he jumped down to the balcony and quickly drew forth a long knife.

Two large doors opened onto the balcony.

*To Be Continued...*



SHAR  
RAUNCE

SWIFT  
CHANCESTONE

**A New View**  
by Marti Grissom

I'm glad I'm still looking over my shoulder  
I'll never give it up, not now, or when I'm older.  
It gives me a chance to see a new view,  
One that seems considered by only a few.

If I only look ahead and that's all,  
It seems I'd be asking to take a big fall.  
With blinders on, one might never find  
That there's always someone tryin' to stick you from behind.

I don't mind feeling just a little uneasy.  
It helps me keep track of the ones who are sleazy.  
Although, of course, this doesn't always work.  
No matter what I do, there's always some jerk

Who catches me between looking front and then back.  
I don't notice at all while they plan their attack.  
"Here's someone," they say, "who'd be easy to get."  
And they take it all away, while me, I just sit.

Don't think that I like this; it isn't much fun.  
Sometimes when they get me, I just want to run.  
But as much as it hurts, and I know I'll never win.  
I'd rather get stuck than be the one sticking it in.

**Bitter Soul**  
by Kelly Balance

Morbid.  
It's depression.  
The burning skulls  
and  
mangled bodies,  
flood the mind.  
It overflows;  
madness bursts forth,  
and you see  
the evil twinkle in the little eyes  
and  
the horrifying grin  
as  
it takes ahold of your very soul and  
it rips into its new found possession  
and then nibbles.  
It likes this delightful thing  
because it is bitter  
and because  
it is your soul.

**The Consequences of White**  
by Chris R. DeLay

A grey bleakness surrounds eternity  
As far as the eye can see, vivid colors are blotted out  
Replaced by creamy white and falling grey

Lands take on a monotone, everything resembling everything else  
Nothing stirs, moves; all are quiet  
Awe-struck by the falling beauty

A bone-chilling cold sweeps across the land like a plague  
Marring everything it touches  
Destroying homes, choking life everywhere it goes

But under this uncaring murderer  
Beauty is spreading her leaves  
A new generation of foliage approaches the border of snow  
Ready to spring into existence  
But never knowing that its days are numbered

**untitled**  
by S

My flesh is withered, pale, and cold, lifeless,  
My bright, blue eyes have dulled to grey.  
This agonizing world has left me soul-less.

I'm surrounded by darkness,  
I cannot escape it.  
The world burns me with mercilessness.

You say I'm psycho, evil, demented.  
We're all psychopaths inside;  
We're all better off dead.

Someone rages with hatred towards you.  
It walks dressed in wicked blackness,  
It's grasp so icy cold it burns within you.

It stabs with a smile, ignoring your pleas,  
It tortures you in your nightmares each night;  
It's neglected, It's unforgiving, It's me.



**The Problem**  
by D. O'Dorant

The young man strode purposefully towards the door. He reached for the knob and opened it. Inside lay a sleeping woman.

She sat up in bed at the first noise and saw him standing in the dim moonlight.

Her scream was high pitched and long, but that didn't matter; she had no close neighbors.

She whimpered as he slowly drew the curved blade from somewhere within his long overcoat and brought it nearer to her.

He raised the blade, ready for the first slash, but he paused. It was happening again; his stomach was threatening to betray him. Who ever heard of a mass murderer who couldn't stand the sight of blood?

At this point, the woman twisted out of his grasp and ran for the door. Reacting quickly, he threw the knife at her. It spun end over end until it stopped suddenly in her mid-back. She pitched over and by the time he reached her, she was quite dead and bleeding heavily.

One glance was all it took, and seconds later he was doubled over, heaving his toenails up.

After a few minutes, it was over and he got up, careful not to look at the body or the wound, and left.

He was thoroughly depressed as he walked out to the car. Now the police would see his vomit and know that the mysterious "Upchuck Killer" had struck again.

His friends at group wouldn't be pleased either. All of their suggestions hadn't worked, even the ant-acids, and they were beginning to believe that he wasn't cut out to be a mass-murderer.

All in all, he reflected, his friends at group weren't a bad bunch. He remembered when he first joined Psychopathic Murderers Unanimous. It was a support group designed to give aid to the newest psychopathic Killers, and to help them with any problems they might have.

At first, they were all really helpful, but as time passed, they turned into real jerks, saying that he wasn't a, "real Killer," and that he didn't have a, "Killer's instinct."

He grew angry at the memory and by the time he reached his car, he was livid.

He'd show them, he thought. He ought to go and kill all of them in their sleep tonight. Yeah, that's what he would do. That would show them all.

Suddenly cheered, he drove away, whistling, "Happy Trails."

| ----- |

**The Adventures of Spare-O and Red Cardinal**  
by Buck and Austin Rich

Episode One: Big Bobby Brutus The Bad Guy From Boston

"Oh my word!" Spare-O exclaimed.

"What is your word anyway?" said Red Cardinal.

"Never mind my word, just look out!" said Spare-O while leaping out of the aisle to avoid being hit by the oncoming grocery cart. Red Cardinal managed to dodge the approaching obstacle as well.

Okay, pause. You, the reader, are probably wondering who Spare-O and Red Cardinal are and how they came about. Super-heroes don't grow on trees you know. In order to tell you the whole story, we have to go back in time say, two or three days. Come with me as we go back in time. (Doo do doo do, doo do doo...)

Joey wasn't having too good of a day. His alarm didn't go off, his Corn Flakes got soggy, and he forgot his notebook on the bus. Things weren't going to well. Montey, Joey's older brother, lent Joey a really good Batman comic to read. Joey's day only got worse when the bully of the school, Big Bobby Brutus The Bad Guy From Boston, stole the comic from Joey. Now Joey and Montey were in a fix. After school they got together in Montey's room to think of a way to get the comic back.

"What should we do about this comic book thief?" said Montey.

"What would Batman do in this situation?" said Joey.

"He would go out and stop the bad guy."

"If we were super-heroes we could go out and stop the bad guy ourselves."

The two sat and thought about their little problem. The silence was broken by Montey's voice.

"I've got it!" said Montey.

"Stay away from me, I don't want it!" said Joey

"Not a disease Joey, an idea," said Montey.

"What?" answered Joey.

"How about you and me becoming super-heroes," said Montey.

"Sure," said Joey, "I've got nothing to do this weekend."

"All right!" said Montey excitedly. "Now we need some rad names for ourselves."

Just then a sparrow and a red cardinal flew through the house. The two birds stopped right in front of Joey and Montey and looked right at both of the heroes-to-be for a while. Then, as fast as they had appeared, the birds left.

"That was really nifty," said Joey.

"Yeah, but we still need some tubular names," said Montey.

Everything was silent while the two thought of new names.

Then, suddenly, Montey yelled, "That's it! Those birds gave me an idea for some awesome names!"

"Yeah," said Joey. "From now on we will be known as (horn sounds in the background) the Flying Fowls!"

"No, no, no you fool. We will be called (drum roll this time, Montey can't play the horn) Spare-O and Red Cardinal," said Montey, who was now the Red Cardinal.

"I like it, I like it," said Joey, who was now Spare-O, "and I can call you R.C. so the author can save paper."

"Yeah, that's a keen idea," said Red Cardinal, now called R.C. to save paper.

"But R.C."

"Yeah Spare-O?"

"To be real super-heroes, we're gonna need some special crime-fighting, uh, stuff," said Spare-O.

"Yeah," said R.C., "we are gonna need some really neat crime-fighting gadgets."

"Well then," said Spare-O, "let's go down to the Really Neat Crime-Fighting Gadgets & Caskets Store."

"Why, did someone die?" asked R.C.

"No, you twit, we'll go there to get the Really Neat Crime-Fighting Gadgets," said Spare-O.

"Good idea Spare-O. To the Cardinal's nest, Spare-O, we'll need some money," said R.C.

"Yeah, to the nest," said Spare-O.

There was a short, but dramatic pause at that moment.

"Uh, R.C.?"

"Yes Spare-O?"

"Where is the Cardinal's nest anyway?"

"Why it's... uh... why it's just over... hmm... uh, no, it's... it's up the, no, no... uh it's, I don't know."

"I think we need to have a Cardinal's nest before we can go to it, unless you think one is going to fall out of a tree."

"Spare-O, your sense of humor leaves something to be desired."

"Ya know," said Spare-O, "we could use that old run-down cave down the street. The one with all the awesome computer stuff, lots of gadgets, great super-hero costumes and that ultra-neato super-hero type car."

"We could, but," added R.C., thoughtfully, "neither of us can drive."

"Oh yeah," said Spare-O, "we'll have to forget about that place. Why don't we just use your room?"

"Sure, that'll be swell." Then, in a very professional voice, "To the Cardinal's nest."

Another small pause followed.

"R.C."

"Yes Spare-O."

"We're already there."

"Gee, we're faster than I thought."

Spare-O and R.C., after asking permission, went to the Really Neat Crime-Fighting Gadgets & Caskets store. They bought all the useful crime-fighting gadgets they thought may be useful. Then, after an embarrassingly stupid mistake made by the sales clerk, Spare-O's equipment was sent in a casket instead of in a box. That evening, Spare-O, after an embarrassingly stupid mistake on his part, slept in the casket. Then, either by just plain bad luck or an embarrassingly stupid mistake on the part of the hearse driver (who happens to also work at a Really Neat

Crime-Fighting Gadgets & Caskets store), a hearse came to the wrong address, took Spare-O, and buried him six feet two inches underground. Luckily, Spare-O had one long fingernail shaped like a pointy shovel and dug his way out in one hour and twenty-three minutes, which happened to be a new world record! After collecting his trophy, Spare-O, extremely hungry, went home. R.C. and Spare-O, now understanding exactly how embarrassingly stupid the mistake was, since Spare-O caused R.C. to worry a lot and, consequently, miss his favorite T.V. show, decided to go to the store to get some junk-food.

While they were at the store, R.C. and Spare-O saw Big Bobby Brutus The Bad Guy Form Boston shoplifting some dryer sheets for his dear old decrepit mother who refused to give him his allowance unless he did (little did Bobby know that he wouldn't get his allowance anyway, but that's beside the point), with the really good Batman comic in his back pocket. This was the perfect chance to test their super-heroic abilities, and get that comic back! Now we, as in you and I, can go back to where we left off with R.C. dodging the oncoming grocery cart. (Doo do doo do, doo do doo do...)

"That was a close call," said Spare-O. The two new super-heroes ran through the store with Bobby Brutus hot on their tail. They had a good lead on Bobby and as they approached the produce section R.C. had an incredibly ingenious idea.

R.C. picked up an apple and said, "Ya know what they say..."

"Who's they?" asked Spare-O.

"You know, *them*?"

"Ah... no I don't."

Bobby was now getting closer. R.C. looked at Spare-O angrily and said, "Whenever you say something that someone else has already said, you say, 'you know what they say...' "

"Oh, I knew that," said Spare-O, not very convincingly.

"Uh, R.C.?"

"Yeah Spare-O?"

"What do they say?"

"They say," answered R.C. winding up to hurl the apple at Bobby who was extremely close now, "an apple a day keeps the bad guy away."

"I never heard anyone say that," said Spare-O as the apple flew toward Bobby Brutus. Bobby, using instinct more than brains, picked up a loaf of french bread and swung it at the flying apple.

"Strrrrrrrrike!" yelled the masked man standing behind Bobby. Bobby, really mad because he broke his new club, knocked the masked guy out in one powerful swing.

"Did you see that?" said Spare-O.

"Yeah," complained R.C., "I expected it to be a bean ball all the way."

Bobby turned and charged the two stupefied super-heroes ready to clobber them with what was left of the french bread. Spare-O and R.C. took off through the aisles of the store with Bobby hot on their heels. After a half-minute or so of racing through the maze of shopping aisles, R.C. came to a sudden stop. Spare-O, extremely curious as to why R.C. had stopped, also stopped. Bobby, who was a little slow at catching onto things, kept running through the maze past R.C. and Spare-O

"I know what we can do to stop Bobby from knocking us unconscious and to prove to them," R.C. then pointed toward everyone in the immediate vicinity, "that we can really pull off being super-heroes."

A short pause followed.

"Do you mean the people that we know what they say?"

"No, it's a different 'them'."

"Ah," said Spare-O in understanding. "Then," asked Spare-O, "what are you going to do? Call every pitch he swings at a ball?"

"No," said R.C. as he removed a small container of liquid from his pocket, "this is how we will stop him."

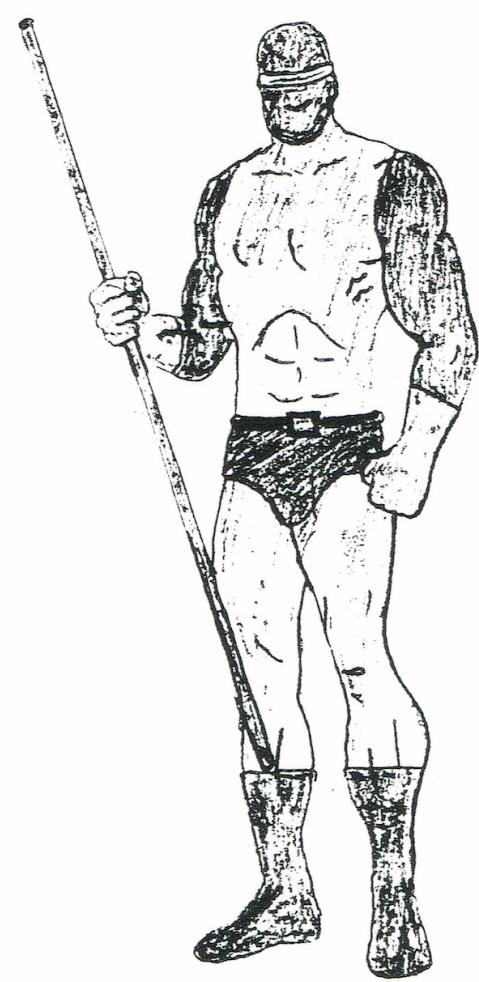
"You actually think he'll stop to have a drink with us?"

"No, no, no you idiot. This is an instant oil slick. If we pour it in front of Bobby it will make him fall down and go boom."

"Brilliant," said Spare-O, "But," asked Spare-O, "how did you know to bring that along with you today?"

"Easy," answered R.C., "I read the script."

"Oh."



Just then Bobby came tearing down the aisle that they were in. R.C. barely had time enough to pour the instant oil slick on the ground. Bobby stepped right in the middle of the instant oil slick and, as it was implied earlier, fell down and went boom.

"I hate to foil your plans," said R.C. as he removed some tin foil from his costume to wrap Bobby up with, "but this comic rightfully belongs to Montey, who lent it to Joey, who you stole it from! Therefore," and at that moment he finished wrapping Bobby up completely, "I'm calling someone to take you in!"

"Golly R.C., you always know the right thing to say and when to say it," said Spare-O. "How do you do it?" "Why, it's easy Spare-O lad." And then he leaned to whisper to Spare-O, "Just read the cue cards."

"Oh... I knew that."

R.C. and Spare-O wrapped up the job (no pun intended). They then called the cops and the cops, as they were asked to do, came and took Big Bobby Brutus The Bad Guy From Boston away. One unfortunate happenstance of all of this was that R.C. and Spare-O had to pay \$39.26 for a broken window. It turned out that when R.C. threw the apple it hit a display of cans which sent them rolling down the aisle. An old lady slipped on the cans, fell into a grocery cart, and rolled into the doomed window. The window popped out of the frame, unharmed, and then shattered as it hit the ground into about 1,763 pieces, give or take about twelve.

"That was a nice job on our part if I do say so myself," said R.C.

"You did," said Spare-O.

"I did what?"

"You said so yourself."

"Oh yeah. Well, now that we're super-heroes that have finally proved ourselves..." then R.C. paused. "Well, since I've no idea what super-heroes do after finishing a case, to the Cardinalmobile!"

"Yes, to the mobile!"

When R.C. and Spare-O got home everything was looking good. They had bagged their first villain and the super-hero business was looking good. Then, suddenly, while at school the next day, the fire alarm went off, unscheduled.

"This sounds like a job for..."

[To find what happens next, and to find out who spoke those foreshadowing words, tune in to the next issue for, (drum roll and horn sound in the background) The Adventures of Spare-O and Red Cardinal. Look for it in every issue of Bob's Imagination. See you then. Actually, I won't see you at all. But, oh well, until next time.]

| ----- |

### The Recluse

by Brandon Burkeen

Mrs. Welby had never had a reputation among her neighbors as an especially "sane" person. This was partially due to the fact that she was old, kept everything she had ever owned, and talked to people that weren't really there.

Another major factor contributing to her ill repute was that she had taken to isolating herself by locking herself into the uppermost room of her colonial-era home and sitting there for hours surrounded by pictures of children from what she called 'the old neighborhood'. This room was easily seen from most places in the neighborhood, for not only was it in the tallest house on the block, but it was a small room surrounded by windows.

She was the kind of old lady that adults didn't give a second thought to, dismissing her behavior to being simply the effects of senility. She was also the same kind of old lady that children made up stories about, and on Halloween night dared each other to go and knock on her door. For instance: one of the most popular stories told of her was that she had children in her basement that were made to do work under the supervision of trolls, and that she had a family of ghosts living with her which were the previous tenants of the old house.

Of course these childish stories had no basis in fact, and every time she heard any part of one of these stories being told, she started crying. So now, rather than doing her own shopping, she asked her niece to do it. Having her niece do her errands for her didn't add any empathy to the myths told about her. In fact, they just made them worse, for her niece had the kind of figure and face that made eligible men go the other direction upon seeing her.

But, life in the neighborhood went on pretty much the same as it had for years, until one day. Melvin Orkney heard a weak knocking on his door. He answered it and to his supreme chagrin, there stood Mrs. Welby.

Why she had come to his door, Melvin had no idea. After all, he was next to the farthest neighbor on the block and had never exhibited any real kindness toward her.

But as he looked at her closely, she looked mildly distracted when she said, "Mr. Orkney, may I come in?"

"Yes, of course," he said, shocked at his own inhospitality.

As she took a seat on his sofa, she looked nervously around the room, then seemed to calm down and tilted her head to the side as if she was listening to someone whispering into her ear. She then shook her head and said, "No Simon. I'm not going to tell him that you stomped through his flowerbed on the way here."

She then fixed her attention on Melvin and said, almost whispering, "Mr. Orkney, according to Simon, something is trying to kill me. He says it will too."

Leaning closer and speaking as if confidentially to Melvin, she added, "Personally, I think Simon worries too much, but he's usually right about this sort of thing, so I trust him."

Bordering on sarcasm and anger Melvin asked, "And what, pray tell, does this thing trying to kill you look like? And why does it want to kill you?"

Mrs. Welby looked again as if she was listening to someone whisper in her ear, then turned and replied, "Simon says it is something like a leopard vampire. He also says it can hide anywhere and makes a screeching noise right before it attacks."

Leaning forward again, she said, "I think he made that last part up."

As if she had just recovered her wits, she added, "Oh yes, he also said he doesn't know why it wants to kill me, but he thinks it is just hungry. You really can't blame it though, all of nature's furry little kitties need food."

Getting up from her seat she said, "I'll go home now. Thank you for your help, Mr. Orkney. I appreciate it terribly."

With more than a touch of sarcasm woven through his voice he asked, "Aren't you scared that the boogie man might get you?"

Turning as if he'd asked a legitimate question she answered, "It's not the boogie man I'm worried about. Besides, Simon says it's safe."

And with that farewell, she left for her home.

"That bloody old hermit should be locked away in some asylum," he yelled to himself the minute he saw her cross the street. "I don't believe they let people like that run loose."

At this point his voice took on a mimicking tone and he said, "Simon says it makes a screeching noise, but Simon exaggerates, Simon says it's safe, Simon says it's not safe."

He went on like this for quite some time until he got so disgusted that he just ceased it. In all his years in the service he had never seen anyone that looney. "My God," he thought to himself, "I've been retired for fifteen years. I shouldn't have to put up with this kind of garbage!"

After all this ranting and raving, the retired sergeant could feel the pain that involuntarily raising his blood pressure always produced. He decided to lie down.

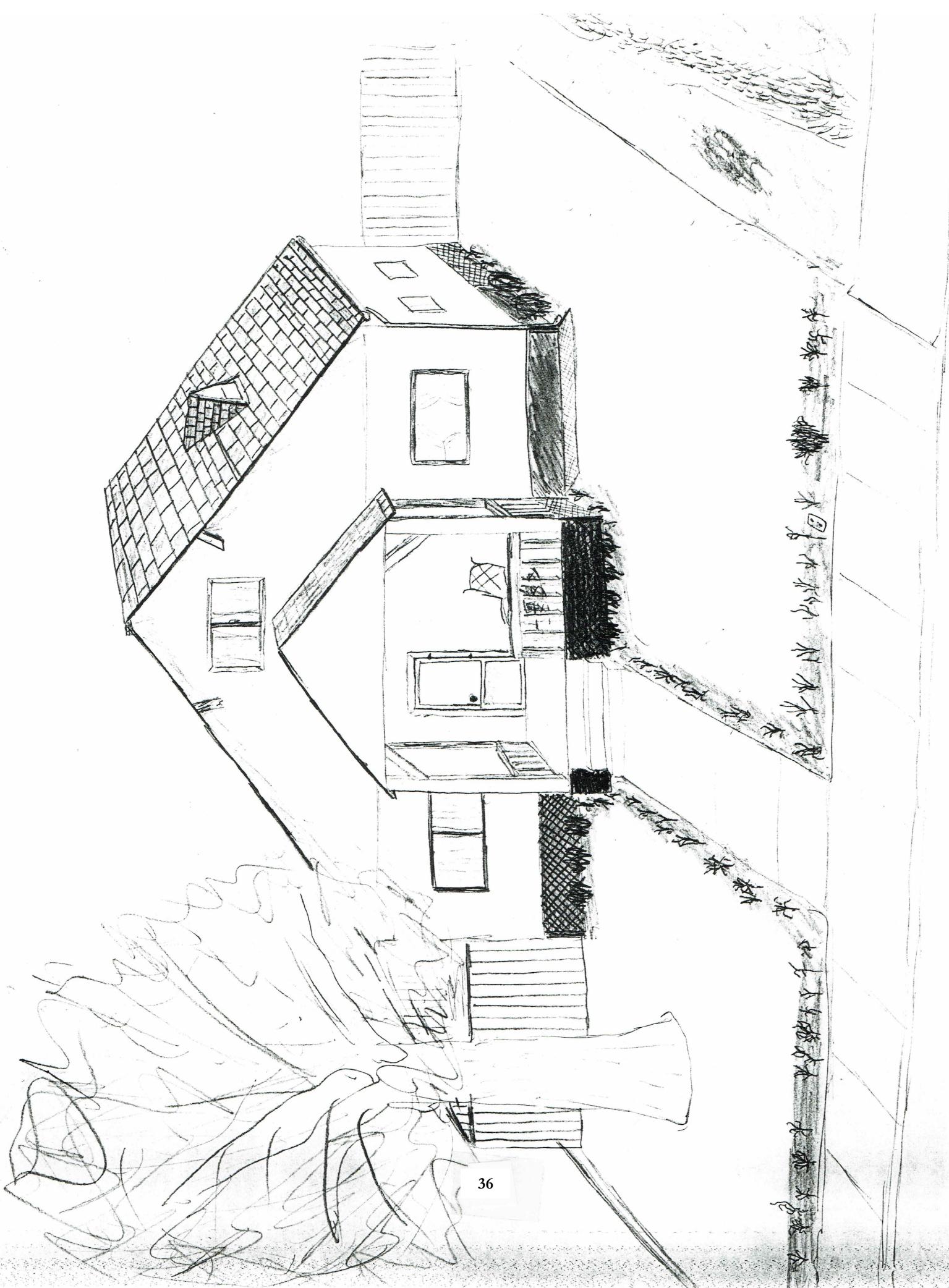
His life continued as normal for about a week. But one day he checked his mail and saw that a postcard addressed to Lattice Welby had accidentally been placed in his mail box. Since he hadn't heard from the old hag for about a week, he figured she had gotten over her phobia. With this in mind, he decided he would take the postcard to her.

He knocked on her door and since he knew she was always in that attic room, he let himself in. As he stepped in the door, all he could see was stacks and stacks of boxes, all organized into aisles. The smell of stale air and dust was overwhelming... and something else, something he couldn't quite put his finger on.

As he came to a spot where the boxes opened into a sort of semicircle, he almost stumbled over the limp and dead body of Mrs. Welby. As he bent over it, he could see two rather large puncture marks on the neck and large claw marks on her face and arms. The strange thing was that there was no blood, no blood from the punctures, no blood from the scratches, and no blood on the floor. She had been drained of every drop of it. The only place he could see blood was in the shape of cat-prints, huge cat-prints, on the floor, trailing off to the stairway.

He started off after them, but as he did, heard a screeching noise above him. He looked up just in time to see huge fangs hurtling toward him. He thrust up his arms to shield himself and...





From the makers of Nosiop Stew and Noxious Brew comes the newest in Explosive recipes:

## **TOXICLES!**

Just send \$9.95 to H.A.N.D., Inc. (Have A Nice Day) and we'll send you three boxes of the delicious Toxicle mix. If you act now, we'll send you a free radiation-proof freezing tray! Accept no imitations! Call now. Operators are standing by... (guaranteed to make you glow in the dark!)

---

### **RECIPE FOR TOXICLES**

You will need-

Secret Toxicle mix

2 cups water

1 package unflavored gelatin

13 cups sugar (to taste)

A large, lead mixing bowl

A radiation suit

Meltdown-proof tongs

A liquid nitrogen freezing chamber

An alcohol thermometer

A liquid mercury thermometer

A Kelvin thermometer

The phone number to the nearest hospital, bomb control center, hazardous waste control

site, and nuclear energy plant. It would also be nice to have the nearest mortuary's

number- just in case.

A small, easily-cleaned nuclear reactor

A very fast car

A heavily armored vault

A very spacious kitchen, preferably the Sahara Desert

First off, put the water, gelatin and sugar in the lead bowl. This would be a good time to put on your radiation suit. Then, add the mixture. Put the mixture in the nuclear reactor, and leave the immediate vicinity (about 9 square miles).

After the mixture has cooled and you have cleared up everything with the local police, you may come back to your mixture. Carefully take your bowl out of the reactor with you meltdown-proof tongs and immediately set in the liquid nitrogen freezing chamber. Failure to do so could mean the spoiling of your mix, not to mention your neighborhood.

Every now and then, use the alcohol thermometer to check the temperature. When the Toxicles are too cold for the thermometer, take the mixture out and pour it into the freezing tray and stick it back into the freezer. Check every five minutes with the mercury thermometer, until the mercury freezes. Then start using the Kelvin thermometer. When the Toxicles reach zero degrees Kelvin, the Toxicles are ready to eat.

Remove the Toxicles with the tongs (Careful! The container is cold!) and serve them to your friends. They're great at parties. If you don't start glowing with 15 minutes, you get your money back, guaranteed!

---

### **Ingredients**

Plutonium, Uranium, Lithium, Argon, Radium, Cesium, Cobalt, Cerium, Terbium, Erbium, Curium, Holmium, Berkelium, Fermium, Nobelium, Europium, Einsteinium, Mendelevium,

Neptunium, Protactinium, Lawerencium, Neodymium, Praseodymium, our secret sauce 238.03, and 412 unknown elements.

For a complete list of known ingredients, look at the periodic table of elements under "Radioactive."

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#### Important Disclaimer

Have A Nice Day Incorporated™ accepts no responsibility for any injury, death, mutation, three-headed, talking, flying cows, meltdowns, loss of life, limb, pursuit of happiness, destruction of house, property, the ruining of any get-together, party, breakfast, etc, resulting from the mishandling or any handling of this substance.

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#### Boy Dies As Microwave Explodes

We would like to give our condolences to the Smallbrain family for the death of their son, Melvin Graykenstocker Smallbrain, who died in a freak kitchen accident when the microwave exploded.

Smallbrain, who one of his friends said, "He [Melvin] was always trying something new," was fixing a new recipe he had received in the mail when the microwave destroyed half the house in the explosion that the police said was caused by, "an obvious mishandling of the appliance."

When questioned, a worker at H.A.N.D., Inc., the company that produced the recipe in use at the time of the accident, said, "Nowhere in it [the recipe] does it say to use a microwave." The manager of the company was unavailable for comment.

Melvin Smallbrain will be buried July 15th on the family plot near Cottage Grove.

Tim Hadley

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#### Sacrifices

by Camile Lawson

With stooped shoulders the little Indian man walks along the dirt road. Dust swirls around his bare feet; years of heavy work and toil have drained his body. You can see in his face the difficult years of being troubled, by the wrinkles that are found in his face.

He is going to the temple of Shiva; while there he will make a sacrifice of flowers to the grotesque demon god. He has made this trip many times before. The serenity around him is the opposite of his inner self. As he approaches the temple he begins to quake inside; he knows if Shiva does not accept his sacrifice evil things can occur. What if Shiva's wife persuades him not to accept it? She is a bloodthirsty goddess who would love nothing more than to start a war just over a small sacrifice. "I hope that today finds her in good humor," he thinks to himself.

He buys flowers to lay in Shiva's altar. He quietly proceeds into the temple with his offering. It has taken a whole month of his wages to be able to buy a flower sacrifice. The room he now enters is damp and dark. It smells of incense and the smell of candles. Light illuminates from the thin candles on the wall. They dance their shadowy dance.

He looks at the massive ornate statue dripping in jewels. It is overlaid with gold and a sickly smile covers the hideous monster to which so many people direct reverence.

Calm and steady now he begins to pray, asking that Shiva's name be exalted and that his wife may have many riches. He asks that his family should be spared from all evil and that they have a good and prosperous

season. He looks up and again sees the hideous smile. He is repulsed yet tries not to cringe. He knows Shiva would be offended and bring ostracism upon him and his family.

He backs down from the image of worship and exclaims, "May Shiva prosper in all." He turns and quickly walks down the stairs.

As he reaches the last step, black clouds are forming, and lightning begins striking all around. A downpour occurs such as he has never seen. The sky has turned a fiery black.

"Shiva is angry with me," the terrified man exclaims. He begins to run, fearful for his family.

Back in the temple, Shiva grins.

---

**Night's halo**  
by Rachel Szekely

Blued blur,  
Adorning myself  
In wreaths of evening leaves,  
Sent down from heaven  
As blessed, blessed tidings.  
Enduring Earth spins  
Abducting you from the day's impatient  
Glare and din,  
While brushing your skin,  
With the water-color  
washed-out dark that leaves  
Seven sins concealed and  
Red transgressions curtained  
Underneath the same covers as  
All virtuous days' events.  
She peacefully relieves eyes  
Of conceiving all of these  
By vanishing a world deep inside,  
Burying inward,  
Until night sheds a halo,  
Giving us over to the angels.  
Now we escape time,  
Noticing no absence as, we,  
Unaware of life  
Are held by death's worldly brother--  
Vulnerable,  
Yet carefree,  
as a child.

**The Stranger.**  
by Kelly Ballance

Movement in the shadows,  
dark shapes that melt back into  
the mixture of blacks and grays.  
Rustling of leaves.  
The wind.  
Snapping of a branch.  
Great strong wind.  
From the north it flies down  
upon this place.  
Many listen to the wind  
Many hear a new sound.  
Tis the coming of a stranger.  
Will he be welcomed into their homes?  
To stand and warm himself by their meager fires?  
Then shall he do what he came to do?  
Who knows.  
Maybe the stranger  
will skip this small town  
and go on to the bigger more  
filthy places down south.  
It depends on luck.

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**Sacrifice**  
by Becky Munsell

The mist swirled, obscuring objects to mere shadows. The soft loamy ground was invisible as she padded softly through the mist. She ducked as an unseen branch loomed into view just before her.

The mist parted and she saw, for the first time, the meadow she had journeyed so far to find. It was ringed with trees, twilight. The tall grasses of the meadow proper waved and bent in a lush, life-filled dance. A soft breeze shredded the clinging remains of the mist and carried it off.



woven jungle. Stopping momentarily she plucked a large blue wildflower blossom from a plant and fixed it in her long tumble of hair as ritual demanded.

Drawing herself up, she strode with dignity to the center of the desolately lonely field that held the chill of death as well as the warm promise of life. Settling to the ground she began to sing the song of ritual, a wordless melody that she had never been taught but was instead written in her very soul. It echoed all the sweet purity of the spring dawn.

Out of the forest the first one appeared, slinking toward her, discreetly hugging the ground. It appeared to be a wolf-like creature with glowing red eyes and wiry black fur.

Another came, this time resembling a giant lizard. Black scales glimmered furtively in the half light of the dawn and its red eyes glowed with the same inner fever that its companions had.

More came from the forest, some looking like large cats, some like wolves or lizards, others simply wrath-like patches of black nothingness.

They circled her, leering evilly at her oblivious figure, each, in their own animalistic way, mocking her purity. She sang on, the melody as sweet and strong as when she had begun. With slow deliberance she looked up at the creatures surrounding her.

She stopped singing and slowly stood, tears starting in her eyes. She turned from one side of the circle to the other and then cried, "I give this sacrifice for the protection of mine. I die so they may live. Let my death be one of need."

She closed her eyes and tipped back her head until her face was staring straight into the ever-brightening sky. Throwing her arms out she called, "I will look on you last father sky, as I feel the mother beneath my feet, for I fear leaving her and I pray you give me strength."

Opening her eyes she looked into the azure depths of the sky that matched both the flower in her hair and her eyes, and then, she died.

| ----- |

### untitled

by Brandy Nelson

She was tired of it. Tired of it all. As she walked now along the old tressle bridge she thought about it. She could hear the creaking of the old ties as the wind whipped through the bridge. In the pitch black night she couldn't see the (pain) she was walking, but she didn't need sight to guide her along a path which she had traveled every day that summer, and each summer before. She knew the way. She could have gotten to the field blindfolded. The old tressle was simply a shortcut. Never had she fallen, never had she been injured.

As Melody reached the opposite side of the bridge she heard the pound she had dreaded each night that summer.

It was the roar of a 1965 Mustang. It wasn't just any Mustang though, it was Allen's mustang. Their relationship had started as normal as any. Two kids at a summer party, or so Melody thought. Little did she know that Allen was no more a kid than Lassie was a poodle.

When Melody had first met him there was no way he could have been anything less than Prince Charming. Good looking, well-off, nice car; he seemed so perfect to her. She couldn't have been more wrong. The only thing that carried her through his abuse was knowing that she had to leave at the end of the summer. Unfortunately, things went further than Melody had expected. She stood there now, knee deep in field. For the first time the moon guided her path. She remembered how Allen had beat her senseless, senseless enough to steal away her consciousness. She had awokened lying only half dressed in the clearing where, by now, she had begun heading toward. In Melody's mind she knew exactly what had happened.

She heard Allen kill the engine of his car. He'd be coming soon, and she was ready for him this time.

She reached the clearing that lie beneath the trees opposite the old tressle.

With one hand Melody gently felt the cut above her eyebrow. She recalled the ridiculous story she had made up about Allen's abuse:

"Mom, I hit my head on a rock while swimming."

She waited now, leaning against the big maple tree that had served as a climber to Melody as a child.

Melody felt a twinge of agony deep inside her. Never again would she be a child, and it was all Allen's doing.

Melody saw now the light of Allen's cigarette dancing as he walked. He was closer now. He was coming for her.

A dark figure followed the tiny point of light out of the tall grass. Melody say him enter the clearing. She wrapped her hand around her courage, the courage she held in her pocket.

As Allen drew close Melody saw the light fall and heard Allen stop to put it out.

"Hi," he said, as if the night before had never unfolded.

Melody's muscles tensed as she felt Allen take her in his arms. Allen attempted to kiss Melody but there was no way that she could have allowed him to get away with what he had done to her.

"No," she said timidly at first, until she found herself screaming it over and over until Allen backed away.

"If you didn't want to give it to me then you shouldn't have showed up," Allen said through a clenched jaw.

"Oh, but I do want to give it to you Allen," Melody said as seductively as she could. Slowly the two moved together.

Just then Melody's courage reared itself as a razor sharp knife. She lunged at him, piercing his chest as stepping back still with the knife in hand.

A gasping sound came from inside Allen as Melody stabbed him again. This time she raised her hand above her head and brought the blade down into his shoulder.

Melody managed to slice Allen's cheek and stab him three more times before he fell dying to the ground. His blood showed dark against the dying field.

Melody took one last look at Allen and ran. When she reached the tressle she darted across stopping only momentarily to drop the weapon.

She stood there in the darkness and waited for the sound of the knife to plunge into the temperate summer water.

It was as though every horrible night that season had disappeared beneath the water just as quickly as the knife had.

Satisfied with herself, Melody crossed over and leaped onto the gravel road where Allen's car was parked.

It had been an awful relationship and Melody didn't want to remember it, but she didn't ever want to forget Allen or the revenge she had taken on him.

She jogged lightly over to the Mustang. Being careful not to leave fingerprints, Melody reached across the seat and grabbed the necklace that hung from the rear-view mirror. She lifted it gently off its perch and admired it.

Allen had been a music lover. The pendant was shaped as a music note.

It shimmered gold in the moonlight.

How fitting Melody thought. Allen had loved music but he had no appreciation for a girl who's name symbolized the very thing he adored.

Melody couldn't help but laugh out loud as she turned her back to the car.

The next morning she was due to head back home and no one would be the wiser. They'd find him there and wonder what had happened.

Melody placed the necklace around her neck. It was perfect.

She turned again and looked at the tressle. Inside she bid good-bye to everything.

Good-bye to summers, good-bye to childhood. Good-bye to fear.

Good-bye to Allen...

| ----- |

## The Pool

by Kelly Ballance

The teenage girl giggles as she dives gracefully into the lighted pool. The cool water washes over her burned skin. The boy laughs as he plunges in after her.

"What are you laughing about?" she asks.

"Oh you'll find out soon enough," he says.

She swims a lap and the boy glides after her and takes her into his arms. He gives her a squeeze that's a little too hard.

"Ow, Todd," she complains.

"Sorry," he says.

"Yeah right," she replies playfully.

A sudden flash of anger lights up his eyes.

"Are you calling me a liar?" he demands.

The girl seems not to hear the madness in his voice.

"Yes," she says as she smiles. She does not see the hate swelling in his face.

The boy suddenly attacks her and pushes her under the water. She fights for the surface, still thinking it's a joke. When she finds the hands holding her down, they make no move to let her up to the blessed air. Her struggles go into over drive.

Todd mutters, "Die, wench."

Quickly she goes limp, trying to deceive him. Fooled, he gently lets her body float to the surface. He swims to the ladder. A quick look back shows him that the girl is already climbing out of the pool and bolting.

"Not this time!" he yells furiously, and he quickly overtakes her. She bites down on his arm as he drags her into the pool shed. She pleads with him to let her go, to please let her go. She'll never tell. He tells her never and pushes her into the pool shed and onto the pool vac. He then shuts the sliding glass door. She scrambles to the back corner and cowers. He picks up a small but heavy rock hammer. Menacingly he pounds his open hand with it.

"My little deer caught in the headlights of oncoming death," he says.

"Please, please, no..." she jabbers.

He stands towering over her and raises the hammer. In a swoosh of air it connects with her head. She screams. It goes up and comes down again. Her screams are cut off. He hits her with the hammer three, four more times, then places it in her hands and quickly checks for a pulse. Feeling nothing he walks to the door, opens it, passes through and shuts it again, leaving his bloody fingerprints on the handle. Not looking back, he plunges into the pool again to enjoy a not quite so silent, but certainly deadly, night.

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### Dreams Blown Far

by Karrie Beasley

How can you dream of Freedom  
When you know it won't come true?  
How can you sing of Freedom  
When you don't know the tune?

Is there any justice  
For hatred showed to the Colored  
Or a harsh brush off  
Where the different are smothered?

Nobody really knows  
What's right and what's wrong.  
Struggling through life  
Trying to be strong.

We need a change  
Something to be proud of--  
Treating everyone equal  
And no one to be made fun of.

### Warmed in the Light of the Sun

by Kelly Ballance

I can't think. I know it will be finished, God helps those who help themselves. And others, he should have said, and others. My arms are raised to the oncoming sun, lifted high above my head. My eyes close, and images shift and mingle behind my eyelids. The thoughts and dreams show themselves. Someday I will speak, oh someday. I sink to my knees and feel the springy soft grass of early summer. Good days lie ahead. On top of this hill, this lonely hill, no one can touch me, but I don't feel alone. I lower my head and sit with my hands folded in my lap. I feel alive, so warm, so loved. I relax and hear the birds singing their morning praises to the sky and its creator, their creator. I, too, owe a song. I lift my voice high and light and join the birds. I feel so much at peace with the world and all in it. My head is clear and I smile. Here I am, painted on the canvas which seems oh so full. I bare no scars or hate from other depressions, only a strong will to live. This sun, oh this glorious sun. Such cheer to rainy days. Such a wonderful creation, this warming, light-bringer. I sing this to you my creator, thank you for the sun.



From: "The Union Revolution"

Once You're Open

by James Stegall

She had to tell him good-bye; Ronald stood across the room from Patricia, looking out a window. They had spent four days together, and now she was fond of him with an inconsequential emotion. He was tall and dark-haired, and beneath moonlight his blue eyes became black. They had just returned to her apartment after a long promenade through the golden city. At a sidewalk stand he had bought her a bouquet of crimson roses; Patricia still held them in her hands.

Anxiously, she moved to a table and set down the bouquet. She glanced up as she heard him turn, and she met his blue eyes.

"The roses are beautiful, Ronald," she said. "Thank you."

He smiled lightly. "I'm glad you like them."

He walked closer to her, and they looked at each other from opposite edges of the table. "I want you to know that I had a wonderful time today, Patricia," he said.

"So did I," the girl answered.

Ronald offered, "I'd like to see you again—"

He watched Patricia's eyes fall.

"—sometime, if I could."

Patricia's gaze remained on the floor. "Ronald. . ." she began.

She heard him breathe; abruptly he turned back to the window and toyed angrily with the yellow curtains.

"You know, Patricia," he said hotly. "My father owns this city. Everything here is going to be mine. There is no senate or council here; there is only a line of succession, and I'm next in line."

Ronald swiveled from the window. "But it's not like that. This city has me trapped. When they see me with a beautiful young woman on my arm, strolling the streets, they smile at me. They want insurance, Patricia. They don't really care whether I happen to like it or not. Those people need a leader. My father doesn't love my mother; no one cares about love. But I do."

"I love you, Patricia," he confessed. "I have never been happier than I have this past week. I want you to know that. Maybe I can't offer you what your father can, but I can give you a lot. I love you, and I don't want to be like my father. I want to be in love."

He swallowed and clenched the curtain in his hand; Ronald nearly ripped the material while he spoke. "I want you, Patricia," he said.

For a long while they stood facing one another; they were drowning and each had their own life preserver. Patricia reached out and supported herself with the table.

Carefully, Ronald moved from the window to the table; he edged the roses and touched her shoulder. Slowly he drew her toward him.

Finally he took her into his arms. "Tell me, Patricia," he murmured. "Let me know. . ." When he kissed her she only met him; Patricia gave him what he wanted and nothing more. She could make her lips satisfying; but she could not make herself love him. She had neither the reason nor desire to extend herself past a simple, physical gesture. It was her female right to give; yet all she could do personally was take. Patricia did not care.

They separated and he looked down at her with his lips half-parted, as if from between breaths. His eyes searched her face frantically.

She hated to touch him. He held her as tightly as his desire could allow; she felt the tension in his chest. Patricia gazed him, watching the exposure and hunger twist within his eyes. She wanted to fall away from him and run; but his arms encircled her too desperately.

Patricia breathed; and she whispered, "You told me yourself, Ronald: you don't want me." She looked up into his eyes, saying, "All you want is love."

Then Patricia let her eyes fall, and softly she told him, "Anyone can give you that."

Burned, he fell from her.

For a heartbeat Ronald stared at the girl with his mouth opened. Then he looked down. He said, "I understand." Ronald clenched and opened his fists.

He staggered to the doorway.

Pausing suddenly, Ronald turned and saw the roses lying on the table. He straightened and looked back at Patricia with narrow eyes.

"You whore," he sneered.

She watched him leave.

Patricia turned and ran a hand through her hair. Frowning slightly, she touched a switch and flooded the apartment with light. She dropped into a deep couch and lay with her eyes closed.

Later she heard the door open. She listened while her visitor stood in the doorway and noticed the roses, and the bright lights. Then Raleigh said, "I would never give a woman roses."

"Why not?" she asked distantly.

"All roses can do is die," Raleigh answered.

She sighed. "They're nice while they last."

"Yes," her brother agreed. "A lot of things are like that."

Patricia opened her eyes and watched Raleigh leave the doorway to sit on the edge of the table.

"Did you tell him?" he asked quietly.

"Yes."

"How is he?"

Patricia clutched the auburn hair at her neck; she gathered it together and drew it around to the tip of her chin. Then she turned to look tensely out the dark window.

"Right now I really don't care how Ronald is," she said. "I wish Father would finish his projections so we could get off this damn planet."

Raleigh looked at her sadly. Blinking, he stood and slipped his hands into his pockets. "Father wants us in the board room," he told her. "I came to get you."

"All right."

He waited while his sister stepped into the bathroom to arrange her hair. She emerged wearing a smoke-blue business suit; offering Raleigh a thin smile, Patricia led him from the room.

"What do you think of Knossos?" he asked her while they walked. I

"It's warm," Patricia answered. "But the air bothers me. The air is too metallic."

"Yes," Raleigh agreed.

Reaching the wooden doors of the chairman's board room, they paused a moment while Patricia straightened her brother's clothes.

She scolded, "You should have changed."

"I'm fine. Are you getting nervous?"

"Why should I be nervous?"

Raleigh shrugged and opened the door.

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## Twisted Deeds

by Brandi Fields

The light of the lamp penetrated my eyes with a subtle, yet sharp sensation. Beads of sweat rolled down the sides of my face. My palms were all clammy. I was trying to look innocent, but I knew that they were on to me. Or maybe it was just me. They had no proof and I know that no one had seen me pull the trigger. What if they found the gun? What will I do? No, that's impossible. I took care of the gun. The river, Silly, ah, yes, the river. How could they find the gun at the bottom of a river?

My alibi. What if they ask me where I was? I know, I sneaked outside from my parents. They thought I was lying in my bed sound asleep. That's it! God, am I good. I'm so good. I've committed the perfect crime and no one will ever find out. (Unless someone spills the beans. So many people are out to get me.) They are going to try to get me. They're all so damn jealous of me. (My looks, my personality, my high standing in this repulsive school.) Everyone wants me for a friend.

"Tracy, can you tell us about Liz? Were you close to her?"

What the hell are they thinking? Like I'm really going to spill my guts out saying how much I loved Liz.

"Well I didn't really know her that well. I had her in a few classes. We talked about the basic girl stuff, guys, clothes, and parties."

"Many other people say you two were close for a long time until your sophomore year." They knew.

Yes, Liz and I were close, best friends throughout Jr. High. I did love her at one time, and she loved me too.

"Ms. Johnson, are you going to answer our question?"

"Oh, yes, sorry. We were close but we drifted apart. We were still friends but we drifted apart. We were still friends but we didn't share our deepest secrets with each other."

"Did Liz have any enemies?"

"Well, as you probably saw by her picture, Liz was beautiful. Everyone liked her, the only reason I think anyone would want to kill her would be to get her out of this school. I really don't know."

"Thanks, Tracy. We will be right back. Do you want to use the restroom?"

"No, I'll just sit here and wait." The two men left the room. Gazing off, I began to think of Liz. I was so hurt the day she told me that she didn't want to be involved with me. That was the worst day of my life. From that day on, I tried to be the most gorgeous girl in our school. I had to make her jealous. The withdrawal I went through, not being near her totally hurt me. I was very depressed, but I didn't want that to show.

When I found out about Nancy, I was furious! Liz had dumped me for someone else. Some dumb airhead bimbo slut. What a bitch, I loved her so much! I would've died for her. Enraged, I went to her house. Her big grin when she opened the door, her nice casual way, like nothing had ever happened. I can still remember our conversation.

"Hello, Tracy, I'm surprised to see you. How have you been?"

"Where do you get off asking me how I am? You should know. My life has turned into a living hell without you. Liz, I love you, I want to be with you and only you." I begged her.

"Tracy, look at yourself. You worthless piece of white trash. You drove me away. I still care for you as a friend." She patted my shoulder.

Pulling my shoulder back I yelled, "Don't ever touch me. Look at what you've done. Accused me. Liz, you're definitely not an angel."

"Hey, I never said I was. I'm just sick of you."

"What about Nancy? You think you're so beautiful, don't you? One of these days someone will get you and rip every single blond hair out of your head. Watch out, don't go out alone." I started to walk away. I felt in my pocket. The gun was still there. I wasn't afraid to kill her.

"Nice, am I suppose to take that as a threat?" She started laughing out loud. It really pissed me off. I was walking out the door and I reached into my pocket and pulled out the gun as if in slow motion. I turned around and I shot right through her back. Blood splattered everywhere. I ran out through the fields. I made it to my house. Then I remembered the gun.

What am I going to do with the gun? Then in the distance, I heard the raging river and I knew what to do. I dropped the gun into the river and beside the bank, I cleansed myself. In a way I cleansed myself of all sins I had ever committed. I had rid myself of her sick presence in my life. I felt no remorse at all. Slowly I walked back to my house, climbed back into my window, and fell into a deep peaceful sleep. I had pleasant dreams of a world without Liz and I was happy. So tremendously happy, she was gone for good. No more trying to out do her. I was going to be the most popular girl at school. I needed a boyfriend, somebody to keep my mind off of Liz.

The next morning my mother came in with the awful news. I acted sad and totally played my parents off. At school, in the middle of class, I faked a breakdown and went to see my helpful counselor. I love how they don't give a shit about you until someone dies or you try to kill yourself. Then they act like your best friend. Oh, my counselor was putty in my hands.

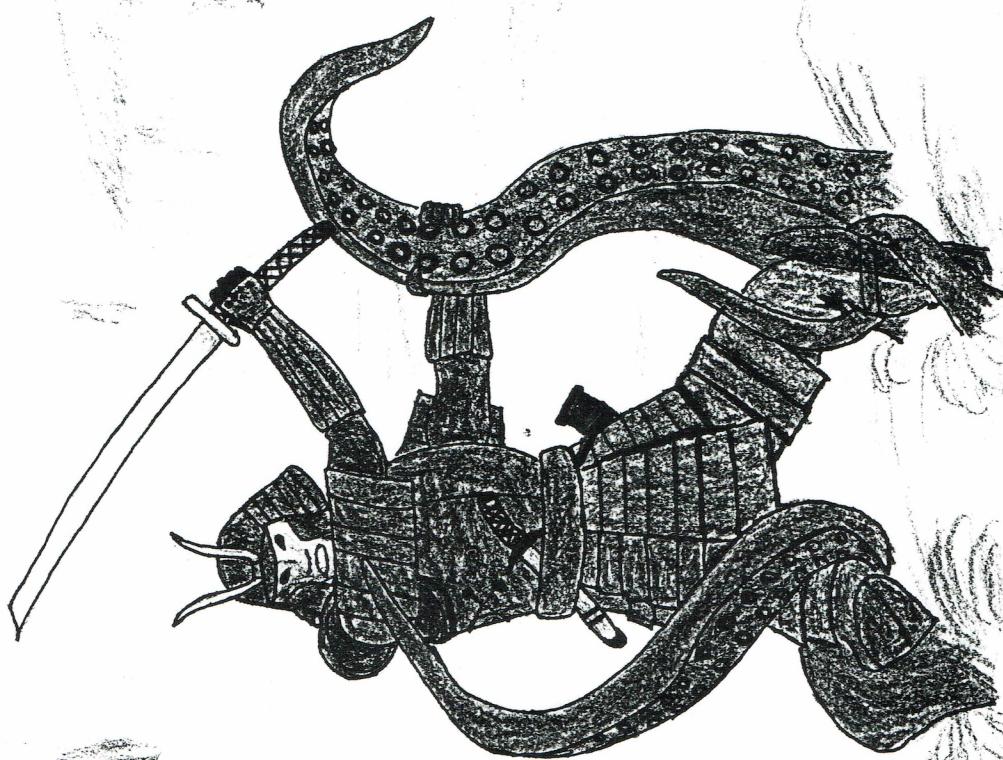
"Tracy." I was rudely taken from my train of thought by the detective.

"Okay, are you ready for more questions?"

"Why of course. I want to get this over with." I smiled innocently at the fat one hoping to give him a slight thrill, which I accomplished because his eyes jetticed away from my eye contact.

"Since the attack of Liz was so brutal, do you think it was a high school person who killed her?"

"Well, anyone can get a gun and shoot someone, even a high school person." Oh god, why are they writing stuff on their papers? They know!



It was obvious that I was totally screwed. What should I say, should I turn myself in or what?

"I just heard. Honestly. I'm telling the truth. Why did you write all that down? Do you think I killed her? Because I didn't. Besides, what if I did? I was in bed asleep. The weapon. You'll never find the weapon, not in your lifetime. I'm smart, you see. I hid the gun at the bottom of the river so you can't trace it to me." I flipped out, I gave myself up.

"Tracy, did you kill Liz? It would be better to turn yourself in now."

Tears started flowing down my face. "I loved her, you don't understand. She hurt me. She didn't want me anymore, stupid her. Stupid, stupid, stupid Liz, I hope she's in hell now!"

I knew what the fat man was going to say before he said it. "You are under arrest. You have the right to remain silent." I blocked the words from my ears. Tracy, you stupid fool. You gave yourself away and all you have to blame it yourself.

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## Fate Into The Unknown

by Quentin Hagewood

I was riding my horse at about the time of December, in the year of our Lord, 1309. I had decided to visit my cousins, for I heard that one of them had been ill and I decided to bid him a good will.

In the meantime, something that I had no knowledge of was happening. The evil legendary Duke of Swearerger, Francis de Blanc, was attempting to carry out one of his many deceitful plots to take over the kingdom of Demuer.

I had seen the Duke only once before but, that once was enough to recognize him again. Francis de Blanc was a dark complected fellow with black soul – frightening eyes, slicked black hair, and a sharp, Devil-like appearance. The Duke always had this constant ghastly scowl on his face, and this look in his eyes, that combined with his goatee beard, made him appear as though he was Satan himself.

While traveling, I happened to come upon the Duke and his ghastly men. I clumsily but swiftly darted to the nearby rhododendron bushes before being discovered. Now, being a member of the king's knights of Demuer and being very suspicious by nature, I had the inclination to find out what the Duke and his men were plotting. For I knew, just as every soul in the kingdom knew, that Francis de Blanc was a very greedy man, and had attempted to overtake Demuer before.

As I spied upon their travels, I started to investigate where they were holding the plans for this attempted monopoly. I discovered that Francis had tried to hide the plans, written on a scroll, in his saddlebag on the side of his stallion. This scroll had a miniature flag that represented Swearerger Royalty, so I deduced this scroll to be the write-up for the overtake. I took this as a rare opportunity to test my horse-riding skills, and save the kingdom. So, with an overwhelming fear in my stomach, an unsuspecting look in my eyes, and a thirst for adventure in my heart and soul, I gripped my horses reigns as tight as I could and commanded, "Heeah!"

I darted past Francis' men and stretched out my arm to posses the scroll instantaneously from the compartment on the side of his horse. Unfortunately, I had forgotten that the kingdom of Swearerger had the most precise archers in the land. So, for my stupidity, I paid the price of being instantly stunned with a steel blunted arrow, approximately one inch, toward the back of my skull, behind my left temple.

The next thing that I remember was awakening in a dark dungeon cell, evaluating my previous encounters with the Duke and his men. I soon realized, as I arose with a constant pounding in my head, that I had been captured and thrown in this musty dungeon. The dungeon was quite small and it had a monstrous steel door with an approximate six by six opening toward the top.

There was this unbearable stench that sent my spine to shiver, as I turned my head to discover a half rotted, full body carcass of some sorry soul who had painfully experienced the treacherous wrath of Francis de Blanc. This terrified me not only by its content but, but the fact that this foretold my destiny, as it were in the hands of Francis de Blane.

My life is so filled for the love of my life, Rachelle, whom for I have survived my day to day trials to see her love-inspired face. And now I may never again hold a smile in my eye. Her figure something heavenly, her long brown hair of strands of silk, her eyes as soft as glowing beads, and her face holds something longed for by many of

my gender. Her beauty has overwhelmed me so, and her personality has enveloped my "heart". I couldn't possibly let her fall, for it would decimate my eternal soul.

Then I suddenly heard the voice of a passing guard, speaking to, who I supposed was the chief official to the Duke. He was speaking of the Duke's attack on Demuer.

"Francis has successfully overthrown the kind, Rutherford's, throne. Our gracious Duke has promised us more power and land by giving us portions of Demuer. I inquired of the Duke that he grant me the castle in the Upper North Field not by a half-mile away from Castle Demuer."

I thought in horror, "My god! Please safeguard my Rachelle from this outside terror!"

I recalled that this field is where my castle is located. It is quite humble compared to Castle Demuer, with its twenty rooms, two dungeons, and colorful ballroom. But most of all, my vulnerable Rachelle, is located there. I could not bear the thought of these fiends overpowering my dear Rachelle.

Not only to the extent as the former, but these ones mentally torturing humble Rutherford. Just as he was getting his affairs in order, these evil ones take his pride and fulfillment in the kingdom, and annihilate it almost completely, with a smashing force. This would be as of taking a person's soul, and descending it into a dark desolate Hell. Dear King Rutherford; how he must have felt. At the time, he was my dearest of companions. He has pulled me through when I was in the absolute lowest point of my existence, and now here I was, unable to come to his support.

How the dear people of my kingdom must feel. There must be absolute paranoia in Demuer. They must be burdened down with total depression. I had felt completely disappointed, not only in myself, but in the world as a whole. I started to lose hope but, I thought to myself that if I lost hope, then what hope would there be for the future of the kingdoms? So, I immediately started to make plans for an escape.

My first plan was to find a loose stone in the structure of the dungeon. I tried the wall directly on the opposite side of the door, feeling the musty smelling mold on the wall. No success. I then slid my hand through the silky spider webs on the wall to the right of the door. Still no success. Then, searching my hand on the wall to the left of the door unsuccessfully, I finished piercing my hand on a sharp stone. Just as I was about to give into failure, I spotted a strange opening in the ceiling. Now this opening was not large enough to escape through, however, it had a peculiar shape to it. I didn't notice it at first, but after the sunlight was through the opening, it created a black shadowed shape on the floor. As I peered at the shape, to my surprise it came to be the symbol of the king's throne, in Demuer!

This symbol, I realized, was there for a reason. There had been legends of the past about spies from Demuer who would portray themselves as members of the enemy's kingdom, and help prisoners to escape back to Demuer.

Legend tells that these heroic ones would create the most secluded passages imaginable. They could provide, with one simple pebble, a way of hope for an entire squad of knights most assuredly destined to doom.

I pondered for the longest time until I came to the conclusion that the fact that King Rutherford's symbol of royalty stood for justice, righteousness, and freedom, (and for the fact that his family line took great pride in their skills of reasoning and their perception of riddles), this symbol combined with its meaning must have something to do with my freedom.

With the eager taste of freedom on the tip of my tongue, I exhaustingly eliminated the possibilities. These phrases of man's goodwill (Justice, Righteousness, and Freedom) had some hidden message of seeming complexity. I knew there weren't any possible humans sided to my advantage left in the castle for they were all discovered many years ago. So, I was left with the question that these phrases must have in some way an effect on the architectural layout of this hellish castle.

*To Be Continued...*

## Michael?

by Aaron Danielson

Michael woke on the hard damp floor not knowing where he was. He was surrounded by darkness, a think black muddy darkness that he could feel all around him. He tried desperately to see his trembling in front of his face but could not.

He got to his feet, looking for any trace of light as he turned round and round in the room. He put his hands out in front of him, walking in search of a wall, then maybe a door or a light switch. He took a few steps when his hands met the cold damp wall to the room.

He searched the entire wall from top to bottom, scanning it with his hands, but he found nothing, not even a slight crack or indentation on the perfectly smooth cement wall. He moved to the next wall from the next. He searched for what seemed an eternity. He then decided to check the floor in the hope of finding a door or anything. He probed the entire floor and found it to be the same as the walls, perfectly smooth, without a tiny crack to alter its flawless surface.

He was growing desperate now, but still there was hope. Maybe the ceiling contained some sort of door or anything. He searched and searched the ceiling only to find he was in a perfectly flawless box!

He sat against the wall and his mind began to race. He began to feel sick. His head was spinning! Who would he escape? What will he do?! The thought of death was strong in his mind! A chill ran up his spine, his skin crawled, and his hair bristled in fear, fear of starvation, lack of oxygen, or insanity! He screamed with horror, but his blood curdling scream echoed within the walls of this box, echoing, growing louder! He could feel the scream all around him penetrating his whole body! He lay there on his side, praying and whimpering as the scream was absorbed into the walls around him.

As he lay there in fear he heard something. It was a tiny squeak. He heard it again. It sounded like a rat or maybe a mouse, he wasn't sure. Then he saw them, the two beady little red glass-like eyes, blood red eyes that seemed to glow in the blackness, but that was all that was seen. The rest of the rodent's body was consumed by the darkness, that think, death-filled blackness! But where did it come from? There were no holes there before. But what he saw next caused him to lose control of his bladder. More eyes, blood-red, hideous, tiny eyes coming out of every part of every wall, the ceiling, everywhere. Their squeaking and chattering teeth growing in intensity, louder, louder, and louder! It was horrible, the echoing of what seemed like a death chant echoing over and over penetrating every fiber of his being!

He reached for a rat to find the hole from which it came, but there was nothing, not even a tiny crack in the smooth wall. They just seemed to appear from out of darkness, slowly creeping towards him. He could no longer hear his screams over the evil deafening sound of their chattering teeth and their claws scratching the floor.

That's when he felt it! The razor-like teeth ripping into his shoulder. He went to slap it away but another attached itself to his hand and before he could even think about standing up they were swarming all over his body, chewing and ripping his flesh! His whole body was numb with pain! He let out a cry for help but it was muffled by the body of a rat as it crawled into his mouth! He felt it take off a piece of his tongue before he managed to chew the writhing body of the rodent in half. He felt them everywhere. The bloody hideous eyes began to spin as he vomited onto the floor. The rats were chewing into his scalp, his ears, his nose and lips! The last thing he ever saw was the two ivory, razor-like teeth gnawing at his eyes.

The rats continued to feed upon poor Michael who was now quite dead until he was just a bloody mass of human remains.

No one ever knew what happened to Michael that night. No one found his remains for many years until they tore down the old abandoned butcher's shop, and there in the meat locker was the remains of Michael and the long rat with its glowing blood-red eyes and its chattering teeth.